University of Alberta

Possibilities for Educational Leadership:
The Hermeneutics of Superintendent-Principal Conversations

by

James Kenneth Robertson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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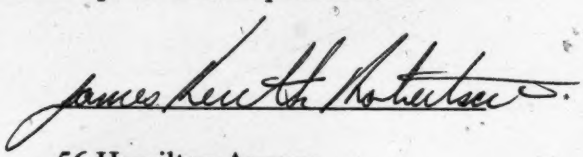

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Abstract

Possibilities for Educational Leadership:
The Hermeneutics of Superintendent-Principal Conversations

Our society and institutional structures, including those of education, are permeated by the language, models, and principles of business. The business metaphor is so completely woven into the fabric of our institutions that it may seldom, if ever, be questioned. Yet we live in what some call a "post-modern condition," a world filled with the complex and ambiguous difficulty of life.

This research describes the journey of a Canadian Superintendent and five principals in search of generative possibilities for educational leadership within their school jurisdiction. Through professional conversation they opened their experiences to questioning, testing, and play in an attempt to open themselves and their practice to new ways of seeing and considering education leadership. At the heart of this study is the struggle that emerges within the lived contradiction of being an administrator awake to the difficulty of life, but operating in a world dominated by the metaphor of business.

In the context of the business metaphor, leadership is often described in terms of the discrete identifiable qualities exhibited by recognized leaders. This research argues that, although these traits simplify and facilitate the development of models, they provide only a shallow description of that which most defines leadership: the network of relationships that opens the organization and its members to possibilities.

This qualitative action research is informed by philosophical and radical hermeneutics involving several layers of interpretation beginning with the research partners' conversational interpretation of their experiences and moving to more technical and radical interpretations of the conversational texts by the researcher. The resulting interpretations suggest that educators may open themselves, their colleagues, and their institutions to generative possibilities through the exploration of alternate metaphors that contrast the dominant metaphor. As exemplified in the study through the contrasting of the business metaphor to the alternate metaphor of "jazz", an alternate metaphor may generate turbulence by challenging previously unquestioned assumptions and providing a "playground" for professional conversation.

This dissertation is both a description of the researchers' unfolding personal journey and a record of the research partners' shared journey in search of "how else it can be" given their local situation.

Acknowledgements:

This text represents a journey that has been nourished by many along the way, including my research partners, fellow students, colleagues, and friends. However, there are those that I must acknowledge for their very special contributions.

As with any journey, there are times when one must turn to others for guidance. I wish to express my gratitude to my guides, Dr. David Blades, Dr. Terry Carson, and Dr. David G. Smith, who provided advice and support that has enriched both the scholarly and ethical quality of this study.

Venturing into previously unknown spaces requires courage. The courage I have had to call upon throughout my journey rises from the example provided by my parents, Suzanne and James Robertson. Their strength and faith continue to inspire the courage to push on no matter what challenges life presents.

A journey must have purpose, and my purpose rises out of my love and devotion to my daughter, Candice. Her endless encouragement and willing sacrifices continue to be my inspiration.

Finally, I must devote this text to my wife, Carmen. As my partner in life, she has walked beside me every step of the journey, picking me up when I stumble and cheering me onward, all the while nourishing my spirit through her love. Together we continue to discover wondrous possibilities.

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Chapter 1: The *Ge-stell* of School-Based Decision-Making

This text is as much a description of a personal journey as it is a record of educational research. It represents an attempt to bring some semblance of order to the description of the research and subsequent interpretation. However, as with the often-messy business of life, the illusion is at times difficult to maintain as experience, research, data, and interpretation bubble over into each other.

Discomfort with Familiar Spaces

As a young lad entering a faculty of education, I purchased a very affordable navy surplus full-length duffel winter coat that at the time was commonly called a "maxi." I wore the coat for all the winters of my university years. When I graduated and left to teach in far off places, I carefully hid it in the back of my parents' cedar closet so as not to be discarded. Each time I returned home, I checked to see that it was still safe. There was a sense of security knowing that my tried and true coat, which had allowed me to weather even the worst of winter storms, was still there. When I returned home to work and study six years later as a married man with a child, I pulled it from its hiding place, changed the buttons so that it was less recognizable as military surplus, and once again began to wear it during the cold damp winter. Each time I wrapped myself in my maxi and headed out into the winter air, I felt secure knowing that it would protect me from the cold winds. I wore the coat less over time, but it was ever present. With each of the many moves we have made during my career I have

carefully packed and unpacked my maxi. Eventually I passed it on to my daughter, whom knowing its history now wears it with the same pride and affection.

For over two decades I have worn with equal pride and attachment my limited, technical/rational[1] view of curriculum as a course to be run or a particular program of studies; a view focused on problem-solving that responds to expressions of concern by adjusting or correcting the course. However, with the convergence of a variety of events, which among others include my studies and research, unexpected changes in my professional life, and ongoing reflection on the state of education, I am called to question the curriculum orientation that exists within the education system I have helped to build and maintain.

I live in a context where curriculum reflects Tyler's "rational-linear approach" (March & Willis, 1995, p. 12), which sees curriculum development as a scientific or technical act centered on "four 'big questions' that curriculum makers have to ask… systematically [and] only in this order" (p. 12):

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[1] The "technical/rational" approach to curriculum is a term coined by University of Alberta professor Dr. David Blades (1997). It is a reference to the behavioral, structural, or scientific approach to curriculum, also typically referred to as "empirical-analytical," "rational linear" (March & Willis, 1995), "structuralist" (Cherryholmes, 1988), technical-scientific (Jardine, 1992) or "Tylerism" in reference to Ralph W. Tyler's seminal work Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (1949).

- What educational purpose should the school seek to attain? [selecting outcomes]
- What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? [selecting learning experiences]
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organised? [organising learning experiences]
- How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? [evaluating outcomes]

Tyler clearly articulated these four questions in the introduction of his book, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (1949). However, he also states that this text was "not a textbook… [or] a manual for curriculum construction… [but] one way of viewing an instructional program as a functioning instrument of education" (p. 1). Yet half a century later, these questions have become a model that continues to dominate education and is consistent with the view of the Alberta government educational authority, Alberta Learning[2].

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[2] Alberta is a province in western Canada. Education in Canada is a decentralised provincial responsibility, therefore, each province has its own Ministry of Education. In 1998 Alberta Education was changed to Alberta Learning with the amalgamation of three ministries: Alberta Education, Alberta Adult Education, Alberta Apprenticeship and Training.

This is evidenced in the content of the common preamble used to set the context for learning in each of Alberta Learning's Program of Studies (2001c, 2001d, and 2001e):

- *Selecting Outcomes*: The opening line of these documents state, "The Program of Studies identifies the outcomes for the core and optional learning components for Kindergarten to Grade 12. Content is focused on what students are expected to know and be able to do" (p.1). Each document identifies the same twenty outcomes "basic education [in Alberta] will allow students" (p.3) to attain.
- *Selecting Learning Experiences*: The selection of leaning experiences are determined locally, "school organization and teacher methodology are not mandated at the provincial level and may vary from class to class and school to school in order to meet student needs" (p. 1).
- *Organising Learning Experiences*: Although selecting of learning experiences is decided locally, the "guidelines and regulations relating to school programs and organization of instruction [can be found in] the Guide to Education: ECS[3] to Grade 12" (p. 1) set by government.
- *Evaluating Outcomes*: The documents states that the "Minister of Learning defines standards for student achievement" (p. 3). To this

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[3] Early Childhood Services (ECS) and Kindergarten are often used interchangeably in Alberta. However, ECS includes preschool programs that begin as early as two years of age.

end, Alberta has compulsory Achievement Tests[4] that are administered at Grades 3, 6, and 9, and provincial high school Diploma Examinations.

In 1986 I changed my buttons of teaching for those of administration, but the coat remained the same. From prescribed outcomes and instructional methods, I adopted participative management systems[5] and shared decision-making models, precursors to the now popular administrative systems of school-based management (SBM) and school-based decision-making (SBDM).

Like my maxi that was borrowed from another world – the military – my view of both curriculum and administration is borrowed from the technical world of business, industry, and the free market. This technical approach to management emerged in the early part of the twentieth century with Frederick Taylor's publication of Scientific Management (1911). Taylor was later followed by the "human relations approach" in the 1930's, and the "behavioral science approach"

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[4] School jurisdiction Achievement Test results are published annually by the government and school jurisdictions are required to publish school results locally. Parents are provided with their child's individual results, however, there is no prescribed method for using the Achievement Test results when calculating a student's summative mark for the year.

[5] The notion of participative management systems emerged in the 1970's and 1980's in the context of "quality of working life" (QWL), and focused on balancing the social (the people) and technical (the tasks and technology) systems to reduce technological alienation. The resulting so-called "sociotechnical systems" give autonomous work groups local control to make decisions based on knowledge of their area and immediate circumstance (Davis & Cherns, 1975, Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

in the 1950's (Hoy and Miskel, 1982). These latter approaches shifted focus from the task to the worker, but they all centered on the technical manipulation of resources to improve productivity. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995, p. 101) link Taylor's (1911) scientific management to Tyler's (1949) curriculum approach. With their shared technical underpinnings these two approaches were adopted as a model for educational change that focuses on strategic planning.

Throughout my career, I have occasionally checked to ensure that my alignment to this framework was intact by taking or giving a graduate course to reinforce my belief that I was wrapped in the right approach and understanding of education. Secure in the belief that I had found the answer to all issues of curriculum and management in the traditions of Tyler and Taylor respectively, I shared my views with colleagues with the same enthusiasm that I shared my past with my daughter.

But my coat of traditionalism has worn thin and it can no longer insulate me from the cold reality of the inherent difficulty of life. As exemplified through my efforts to implement SBDM[6] as policy, where no matter how often administration, staff, and school councils are engaged in a consultative process to ensure that policy is understood and meets the needs of various school communities, little or nothing can be done that will allow policy to meet

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[6] For the remainder of the text, the acronym SBDM is used as a reference to both school-based management and school-based decision-making unless otherwise indicated.

legislative requirements, school board expectations, and community anticipation simultaneously. Nor can policy ensure that schools would or will focus SBDM on "teaching and learning" as prescribed by Alberta Learning (Alberta Education, 1996). From this and related experiences I began to question a system that I was actively involved in building and on a daily basis I was expected to defend.

This research threw me out into the cold without a coat, exposed to new possibilities, driven to question, un-accepting of much that I once believed to be obvious and true. I found myself drawn to places further and further away from the world of Tyler's "rational" in search of another place; a place that I initially thought might be called the "post-modern." Trapped in a technical paradigm of time and space, I believed that the search would take me elsewhere, a foreign land beyond my experience that with time, energy, and money could be reached. But as I grew, and continue to grow, in my understanding of the post-modern, I have learned that what I seek may be found closer to home.

Escaping technical paradigms may be difficult if not impossible, while fenced in by SBDM and tethered to Three Year Business Plans, Achievement Tests, and satisfaction surveys built on a foundation of outcomes and productivity. The technical mind-set as manifested in SBDM may not only limit our vision of administration, as the research in this dissertation will demonstrate, it defines our understanding of every aspect of education, curriculum, and leadership. All one needs to do is consider the language of the Alberta Learning 2000/2001 – 2002/2003 Business Plan: Revised Goals and Outcomes, which includes

references to work, the economy, and/or finance within the related outcomes for each of the five goals (see Appendix A).

Has the education system become too accepting of performance measured in terms of balanced budgets, the maintenance of physical and material resources, and outcomes measured by gains and losses in percentage? The implications of the business language that enframes SBDM may require greater consideration: industry uses workers [teachers], supervised by middle management [principals], organised by upper management [senior administration], processes raw materials [students], has inputs [programs], outcomes with quantifiable gains [test and diploma results], is fuelled by suppliers [parents], subject to clients orders [business], meets consumers demands [society], and adjusts for losses in revenue [reductions in employees and services]. This is an all too easily recognizable reality for educational leaders, but is this the reality or paradigm that should enframe our vision and understanding of education?

Heidegger (1950/1977) states that technology is more than a thing, it is a way of being. He maintains that "we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it" (p. 4). Heidegger's explains the "essence of technology" (p. 4), using the metaphor of an apparatus, a coatrack, or framework, "*Ge-stell*" (p. 20); that upon which we hang not only our ideas, but also our very being. *Ge-stell* is that which enframes every aspect of our existence, limiting our ability to see from alternative perspectives. Once we understand the

technical nature of SBDM, and the *Ge-stell-like* blinders that limit our view of the world to technological vision (Levin, 1988), it follows that we are destined, through SBM as *Ge-stell*, to having all "other possibilities... blocked" (Heidegger, 1950/1977, p. 31).

However, the very argument that a business/industry model for the management of schools is inappropriate may itself be flawed. From a technical/rational perspective, if the present course of action is not working, it is a matter of identifying and running the new, corrected, course; inherent to the belief that one model is flawed, is the belief that yet another model would better frame our vision or understanding. Here in lies one of the greatest impediments to the opening of possibility, the *Ge-stell*, the natural tendency to slip back into the maxi with a new set of buttons.

But what does post-modernity offer? Post-modernity by definition is elusive and difficult to define. It is used in reference to a variety of different styles and interpretations that are rooted in some form or another to a critique of modernity (Slattery, 1995; Smith, 1999). Modernity is often characterised by Grand-narratives or meta-narratives that advocate generalities or universalize their conclusions; otherwise stated they claim to represent a final truth or as Lyotard (1984) defines them, "narrations with a legitimating function" (p. 19). Lyotard (1984) defines "postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives" (p. xxiv) because they privilege or legitimate a particular point of view.

Doll (1989) characterises post-modernity as "a critical reappraisal of modern modes of thought, religious beliefs and moral conviction… deepening suspicion of the rigid dichotomies modernity has created between objective reality and subjective experience [italics added], fact and imagination, secular and sacred, public and private" (Doll, 1989, p. 244). Doll attempts to characterise the key differences between modernity and post-modernity as follows: modernity is closed [mechanical], simple [separate, linear], and accumulative, while post-modernity may be considered to be open [organic], complex [cosmological, web like, "counterintuitive"], and transformatory (p. 245-251).

Although Doll ironically uses very modern binary terms to dichotomise the difference in the modern and post-modern, a binary that the post-modern would undoubtedly challenge, it too is helpful in the suggestion that the post-modern lies within our *local* experience waiting to be dis-covered, un-veiled, in-vented.

But how might one begin this journey of discovery? As part of my doctoral program at the University of Alberta during the introductory course, EDSE 503: Curriculum Foundations, Professor David W. Blades in describing post-modernism introduced three questions that in his research he had found helped when considering the post-modern perspective: "What is it?"; "Why is it like that?"; and "How else can it be?" (personal communication, December 6, 1997). These three questions played a key role in setting the questioning of my curriculum orientation in motion, and gradually led to the central research question:

What local possibilities for educational leadership exist in the context of school-based decision-making?

The use of the term "local" is in recognition of the uniqueness of individual and group experiences that contribute to the responses to the question "How else can it be?"

Before attempting to explore this emergent research question, I begin by confessing its inherent ambiguity. As much as my wish may be to approach the question from a post-modern perspective in the hope of opening possibility, it is equally possible to approach the question from a modern, technical perspective that proceeds to identify *the* possibilities. In short, the research could lead to the construction of a systematic meta-narrative that defines all possibilities within a context of SBDM as a management model. However, this was not the intent of this research.

The notions of modernity and post-modernity are inextricably linked; by their very nature, these binaries/not binaries, provide a way of seeing that sets them apart, yet places them firmly together. In the pages that follow, I intend to show that possibility is not the property of one or the other; either may contribute to an obstruction and/or opening to possibility. It is in the shadows "between" that I propose we might find new and previously unexplored possibilities for educational leadership.

Chapter 2: A Contemporary Context of Educational Leadership

Living in a home filled with music, at the age of eight I asked for music lessons and my mother described to me what my request meant. First and foremost it would require discipline and dedication in the form of practice. I would be learning a new universal language, one that would open doors to a world of wonder and possibility. But the keys to these doors were hidden within the ability to master technique, and there were many doors to choose from classical, modern, jazz, popular, and so many more.

Over the next several years I would start, stop, and start again, eventually mastering much of the technique that was meant to control the music. But the road was not straight, and like any young colt I resisted the bridle with each tug, longing for the ability to run free and play with my growing skills. I would begin each practice determined to follow the music as written. But over time, much to the dismay of my teacher and mother, as my technique grew I seldom followed the composer's perceived intent. My hands were agile and strong and my heart would overcome my mind as the music seemed to flow from my fingers unmindful of the score or call of technique.

Throughout my professional life technique has continued to call. But unlike my early musical experience, overtime I have allowed the voice of technique to overwhelm and often silence the voices from within that spring from the heart and are filled with intuition and possibility. Based on my experience I believe that this same call of technique profoundly influences educational

administration in Alberta's schools as exemplified in the implementation of SBDM. What follows is a description of the context in which SBDM has emerged in Alberta and how it has changed the lived experience within schools.

Understanding: "What is it?"

The proceeding sections describe the context for the emergence of SBDM as the mandated structure for the management of Alberta schools. First, a discussion linking education and the corporate community in the context of globalization will be used to situate the Alberta experience. SBDM seems to reflect the contextual enframing, the *Ge-stell*, that has developed since post World War II and further facilitated by the rapid growth of technology. Second, this section develops the immediate context of the emergence of SBDM in Alberta, showing how SBDM-as-policy and regulation was generated by official agencies. Through further exploration of the link to business and industry it is possible to demonstrate the significance of the technical approach to management that dominates educational administration and how it may influence the lived-experience of school principals. Third, a preliminary look [a glimpse] at the local lived-experience of SBDM through the eyes of a group of school principals will be examined in light of the central research question.

Before proceeding with the description of "what is it," it is important to note that the intent is not to generate a critique based on dissatisfaction with the way SBDM *is*, leading to a description of how it *ought* to be. The intent is not to

develop a new model rooted in yet another metanarrative that lives in dichotomies such as "right-wrong" or "legitimate-illegitimate" based on "consent-coercion." This tendency towards dualistic thinking reduces the possibilities for critique by saddling it with the need to generate an alternative. Rather, the intent is to approach the critique of SBDM as mandated in Alberta as "a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest" (Foucault, 1988, p. 154).

I begin with an exploration of the global context, provincial policy, and local experience of a group of principals in the hope of revealing the importance of finding new ways to open local possibilities.

The Role of Education on the Global Stage: Democracy, Capitalism, Free Markets, and Globalization

Growing support for the proliferation of the free market and globalization has lead to the preponderance of capitalist ideals with respect to governance at many levels, allowing business and industry interests to influence government policy. By way of example, woven into the outcomes in the Alberta Learning 2001/2002 - 2003/2004 Business Plan (see Appendix A) are references to employment, business practice, or the economy:

> The learning system meets the needs of learners, society, and the economy.... The learning system is affordable.... Learners are successful in finding and maintaining employment.... Employers are satisfied with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of employees.... Joint initiatives contribute to the achievement of the social and economic goals of the

> province.... The Ministry demonstrates value for dollars.... The Ministry demonstrates leadership and continuous improvement in administrative and business processes and practices [italics added] (pp. 7-14)

As can be seen from this example, the language of business and industry that is reflective of free market ideals is allowed by governance structures to penetrate the language of education, leading to what may appear to be the seemingly natural emergence of SBDM in educational administration. But how might this language of the free market that has woven it's way into the business planning process of the Alberta's Ministry of Learning be understood?

Thurow (1996) states that Western politics rely on the coexistence of two possibly antithetical principles: political democracy and capitalist economics.

> One [democracy] believes in a completely equal distribution of political power, "one man [sic], one vote," while the other [capitalism] believes that it is the duty of the economically fit to drive the unfit out of business and into economic extinction. 'Survival of the fittest' and inequalities in purchasing power are what capitalistic efficiency is all about. (p. 242)

Thurow further states that these two opposing principles can only work together when the inequities of economic wealth, created by competition in a market economy, are balanced by government interventions in the form of publicly funded social programs that include education, health, and social welfare (pp. 242-278). We have entered a new age, where for what may be the first time we must consider the possibility that capitalism will not be kept in check by the interventions of democratic government. With the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of communism, and the opening of China's doors to international trade, capitalism has fewer and fewer competitive barriers in alternative political

thinking. Perhaps a prime example is the shift in 1995 from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), with its more narrow focus on tariff reduction to the World Trade Organization (WTO) that "now also works to eliminate nontariff barriers, and can be used to challenge environmental, health, and other regulations that may… be regarded as impediments to international trade" (Anderson & Cavanagh, 1997, p. 1). With pressure of this type on public policy, government may inevitably become little more than a means for capitalists to protect and proliferate the free market. Left unchecked, capitalist forces could drive the political agenda towards increased privatisation of public services under the banner of greater accountability and efficiency.

An example of the link between privatisation and accountability can be found in the Government of Alberta's acceptance of the "Private Schools Funding Task Force Recommendations" (Alberta Learning, 1998). The opening lines of the government release of the recommendations read:

> Accredited private schools in Alberta will be eligible for more funding from the provincial government if they meet <u>new accountability requirements</u> [italics added]. The decision reflects the government's support for parent choice in the education of their children. (p. 1)

All 26 recommendations from the task force were accepted, including a recommendation to increase funding for accredited private schools from 50% to 60% of the per student funding given to public schools. Implementation of these recommendations cost the Alberta government an estimated 1.9 million dollars in the 1999-2000 school year and an additional 5.3 million dollars in the 2000/2001

school year. Further, the recommendations included the creation of "designate private special education schools" (p. 1), giving "parents of students with identified mild and moderate special needs" a choice between a public school and a designated private school. These designated private schools receive the full basic instructional grant with an additional per student allocation equivalent to approximately ten times that given to public schools for the same type of student[7]. However, with parental choice comes the responsibility for any additional tuition and transportation to the designated private school, which for some parents makes the choice impossible. Some would argue that this support of private schools creates a two-tier system that privileges those that can afford the additional services, and others would argue that it relieves some of the burden on the public system. It is arguments of this type that illustrate the antithetical nature of the principle of equality within political democracy and the principle of efficiency within capitalist economics.

The United Kingdom and United States under the leadership of Thatcher and Regan, and later under Blair and Clinton, have been at the forefront of educational policy changes that incorporate free market and human capital

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[7] The additional per student allocation was justified by indicating that in public schools approximately one in ten students has mild or moderate special needs and a portion of each per students should be used to serve these students.

concepts. Influenced by free market or neo-liberal[8] economists such as Friedrich von Hayek, government intervention has shifted its focus from the development of social infrastructure: education, health, and welfare services, to supporting economic interests through protection of the free market (Spring, 1998, pp. 122-124). This seems to suggest that individual choice and responsibility to self should take precedent over a more democratic general well being of collective society. If one accepts this hypothesis, the purpose of the education system then becomes a preparation of individuals to play their role in a free enterprise system. Based on assumptions [or perhaps myths] that flow from free market, business, and industry thinking, the key role of education becomes the development of employability skills (Spring, 1998, chap. 5, pp. 120-158). Although I believe that efforts to articulate employability skills are developed with good intentions to assist students in identifying those skills that will lead to success in the workplace, it might also be interpreted as support for the notion that business and industry are attempting "to transform schools into training centres for producing a workforce

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[8] The term neo-liberal has recently entered the literature, and refers to economists and politicians that support a liberal political philosophy advocating personal freedom for the individual, democratic forms of government, and gradual reform in political and social institutions, but are critical of liberal laissez-faire policies and advocate active government intervention to protect the workings of a free market. This is an extension of Friedrich von Hayek's free-market economics of the 1970's. He contended that the state is necessary for enforcing laws that protect privacy of property, contracts, and the workings of the free-market (Spring, 1998, pp. 122-124).

suited to the needs of transnational corporations" (Smith, 1998). Further, it may be argued that for neo-liberals the education system must do more than prepare workers, it must model the free market system. From this perspective education is characterized by individual choice of schools, funding linked directly to the individual student [voucher systems], Achievement Tests, national standards and curricula, performance incentive programs, and advocacy of life-long learning.

In Canada, the language of neo-liberalism is not foreign to Albertans, who will recognize these characteristics in the extensive curriculum reforms that began in 1985, as well as in the management and financial restructuring that began in 1994. However, few may realize that the roots of these sweeping reforms to the education system can be traced back to the 1977 Harder Report[9] published by Alberta Learning (Mazurek, 1999, p. 14). Contrary to popular beliefs, these changes were not constructed "merely on the whims of a particular government under a particular leadership... the process... can be traced back at least two decades to the early 1970s" (p. 17).

In an attempt to capture the struggle they believe is being waged in the space between democratic and capitalist ideals Harrison and Kachur (1999)

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[9] The Harder Report (1977) was prepared for the Alberta Government's Ministry of Education, Alberta Education [now called Alberta Learning], and was titled, Alberta Education and Diploma Requirements: a Discussion Paper Prepared for the Curriculum Policies Board.

articulate the difficulty with the neo-liberal agenda as it relates to educational policy this way:

> Public education is a fundamental element in the establishment, maintenance, and transformation of democratic citizenship, not only through what is taught, but also through the process of how things are taught and as the means for understanding and transforming the unequal conditions of social existence.... Education in the larger sense means more than technically retooling the workforce, or the emergence of professional classes or even the encouragement of a manufacturing culture in the schools and colleges.... It also implies a deep understanding of why our world is changing, of how other people and cultures feel about and respond to these changes, and of what we have in common - as well as what divides cultures, classes, and nations. It should provide also a safe space for the development of personal autonomy and social criticism. (p. xxi)

This suggests that in a neo-liberal society, like the contented worker, students may be limited to the affable consumption of information needed to make them marketable in the context of a free market society. David G. Smith suggests that in schools, "gone is the meta-cognitive, the ability to examine or question underlying assumptions, nature, and structure" (personal communication, May 29, 1999). Does this mean that in the context of a neo-liberal framework, the ability to critique what is, and dream of how else it could be is gone? If so, where in lies the hope? Should education provide more than the basic tools to function in the workplace; should education provide opportunities to question and explore the many different roles we may play individually and collectively at home, work, and as a member of our society?

The Provincial Setting: The Emergence of SBDM in Alberta

Across Canada, the United States, and many Commonwealth nations, there is a growing acceptance of SBM and SBDM as the way schools and school districts should be structured to allow greater autonomy at the local level (Alberta Education, 1997b; Brandt, O'Neil, & Scherer, December 1995 / January 1996; David, 1989; Mohraman, Wohlstetter, & Associates,1994).

Although SBM and SBDM have become part of the common language of educational administration, there is little commonality in the ways these are interpreted in the many jurisdictions that have adopted this management philosophy. However, by drawing on their origins in the business/industry models of site-based management and site-based decision-making, which emerged from "quality of working life"[10] (QWL) and sociotechnical design, it is possible to construct the following definitions that form the basis of SBM and SBDM.

SBM is the decentralization of decisions related to school operations, student services, and programs to the local school level under the supervision and leadership of the school principal and a school advisory group composed of the various stakeholders. The goal of SBM is to increase local school accountability for the allocation and distribution of teaching and learning resources (human and

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[10] Quality of working life is a process that restructures an organization by establishing evolving interpersonal problem-solving techniques, while balancing the needs and interests of both the employees and the employers (Davis and Cherns, 1975).

material) in an effort to improve students' academic performance. SBDM refers to the sharing of decisions with stakeholders; persons closest to the students are provided with an opportunity to be involved in decisions of significance that guide school operations, student services, and programs.

In the late 1970's schools began to experiment with what could now be termed SBDM. Isolated efforts where schools were given the opportunity to exercise autonomy over a wide variety of controls began to produce a number of local successes. Several of these perceived successes were documented in the December 1995/January 1996 edition of Educational Leadership, titled "Site-Based Management: Making It Work," which included two Alberta examples, "On Tapping the Power of School-Based Management: A Conversation with Michael Strembitsky" (O'Neil, p.66) and "Orchestrating Community Involvement" (McPhee, p. 71). Examples such as those sited in Educational Leadership generated an interest in research and a desire to explore the possibilities for large-scale implementation.

A brief history of the implementation of SBDM in Alberta may provide greater insight into how this business-industry management ideology that allows for the decentralization of decision-making powers to the local level, can also maintain some level of centralized control through policy. In 1993, Alberta Learning initiated a review of the educational system as outlined in the document Meeting the Challenge: An Education Roundtable Workbook (Alberta Education, 1993). In this initial document there is no direct reference to SBM or SBDM,

rather, it outlined four main areas to be reviewed: defining a basic education, funding education in Alberta, measuring results in education, and changing the delivery of education. One year later, Alberta Learning's planning guide for school jurisdictions, Meeting the Challenge: Three Year Business Plan 1994/95 – 1996/98 (Alberta Education, 1994), indicated its intention to implement SBM. In the context of the four main areas of review for changing the delivery of education, it was included in Goal 5 with the stated objective being:

> Restructure the governance and delivery of education to achieve increased efficiencies and effectiveness, [and more specifically to] establish school-based budget and program [italics added] decision-making, including staff development. (p. 9)

For the following two years, in Meeting the Challenge II (1995) and Meeting the Challenge III (1996), again under Goal 5, there was the simply stated objective, "implement school-based decision-making."

In January 1996, the Alberta Government mandated the immediate implementation of school-based decision-making [italics added] by all school districts. Yet school-based management [italics added] was not explicitly mandated in the legislation; instead, legislation (see Appendix B) and subsequent government policy mandated it implicitly in the delegation of specific responsibilities directly to school principals.

These changes in legislation, policy, regulation, and guidelines were and are fraught with paradox and ambiguity. While greater local autonomy was seemingly being encouraged, stringent guidelines regarding such things as teacher

performance, curriculum outcomes, student achievement testing, funding, and budgets swiftly followed. School councils with majority parent membership were created, their role being to advise and consult principals and school boards on matters related to their schools, with specific reference in the legislation to fiscal management (see Appendix C). Yet contrary to the original or anticipated intent of school councils, these councils have no directly legislated school-based decision-making powers.

By 1997, Meeting the Challenge IV (Alberta Education, 1997a) no longer made any direct reference to SBDM, however, Alberta Learning published a Policy statement that refocused SBDM on "teaching and learning"; see Appendix D in this document. It seems that initially the implementation of SBDM in Alberta was motivated by a desire for "efficiencies and effectiveness" and that with time and experience the central focus shifted to teaching and learning.

Few whom have lived the Alberta experience would deny the paradox created by attempts to mandate SBDM-as-policy under tight centralized controls. Guidelines, as detailed in policy (Appendix D), have curtailed local autonomy and created preoccupations for schools that may detract from local decision-making. Six years later there are school jurisdictions that continue to struggle with the implementation of SBDM-as-policy as evidenced in the comments of principals in the following section.

An example of the frustration that SBDM-as-policy can generate may be found in the following comment from a parent during a school council meeting

where I was attempting to gather feedback on our local school jurisdiction SBDM draft policy. Following a rather elaborate presentation parents were asked if they had any feedback or comments. After a lengthy silence one parent finally commented:

> It [the jurisdiction policy] really does try to leave space for local flavour, but nothing is left to the imagination. (personal communication, November 1997)

This statement captures the ambiguous nature and the general frustration of implementing SBDM-as-policy that limits local possibility to parameters defined first by the provincial government and further limited in jurisdiction policy. This spontaneous parental reaction to the draft policy inspired a great deal of personal reflection relating to how I as an educational leader could inspire local school communities to explore possibilities beyond the limitations of policy. The comment contributed significantly to the development of the central research question examined in this dissertation and lead to the local survey of school principals that follows.

Survey of the Local Landscape: Ambiguity in the Lived Experience of School Principals

The above descriptions of the global and provincial settings provide a frame of reference. But it is in the act of reconnaissance, an exploratory survey or examination of the existing situation, with a group of school principals that one better understands the impact the implementation of SBDM has had on the local

landscape. For this reason, while preparing my research proposal I engaged in a background pilot survey with the principals in my school jurisdiction.

Twelve school principals were asked to share on a voluntarily basis their experiences and personal stories about implementing SBDM, and to provide individual critiques of government and local jurisdiction policy.

Nine of the twelve school principals chose to respond to the "Questionnaire to Principals" (see Appendix E). Only two principals actually shared their experiences in a narrative format. The majority did not describe or tell the stories of their experiences with SBDM. Rather, most principals expressed a great deal of concern generally about the implementation of SBDM in the present context as established in policy by the Government and school district, with brief references to particular incidents or events. The majority of the concerns expressed can be grouped under three main themes: issues of control, finance and allocation of resources, and process and decision-making. All of these themes are closely linked, but clearly issues of control were the most prevalent and binding.

What follows is a series of excerpts from the responses of the nine principals[11] that responded to the questionnaire. Before reviewing their responses, it is perhaps important to note that there may be those that choose to interpret the

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[11] Principals were provided with a copy of this analysis of their responses, and confirmed that it captured their perceptions and feeling about SBDM. Permission to use the principals' comments was requested and individually confirmed by each principal.

principals' expressions of concern as mere frustration and dissatisfaction. However, the honesty and openness of their comments can also be viewed as a sincere desire to contribute to an opportunity to explore new possibilities for SBDM.

Anonymity and confidentiality of principals has been preserved by identifying each with a letter designation (A, B…).

Control

SBDM is based on the decentralization of decisions to the school level under the supervision and leadership of the school principal. In fact, the Alberta *School Act* (2000) gives the principal direct control, responsibility, and accountability for school-based decisions (see Appendix B). Yet principals report a very different perception as reflected in their experiences. When asked about the opportunity for local control in the context of present policy the following typifies principals' responses:

> I often see my job as a salesman [italics added]. Always convincing people to do things – coach, volunteer, stay for meetings, organize events, etc. No real …power or authority to control situations or mandate decisions. (Principal A)
>
> Board policy frequently provides still the overall parameters within which, or deadlines by which, decisions must be made…. There is a myriad of controlling factors for schools. (Principal B)

After providing a description of the process used to consult stakeholders and obtain Board approval, one principal summarized the experience as follows,

"We wound our way through the various stakeholders and suggested alternatives to each problem… interesting process to say the least" (Principal C).

Yet another principal chose to describe the relationship between principals and the Board of Trustees in this way:

> Principals resent having to ask permission for powers they believe have been granted by the Provincial Government Policy, and School Boards fear that Principals may not be up to the business of caring for all children in the system. Both have a good point [italics added]. (Principal D)

The brief additional comment italicized above is very telling; it alludes to the ambiguity of perceptions that echo through the principals' texts.

Finance and allocation of resources

Every principal commented on the need for greater control over funding at the school level, while expressing concern that the Board of Trustees' focus is on developing controls to ensure the fiscal responsibility of schools. For example, one principal commented:

> Although the intent [of the Alberta Government] may have been to ensure effective, ongoing staff involvement in making decisions that affect them, it became quite evident that the "financial management" aspect was the major focus of the jurisdiction. Many of my school-based decision-making experiences have centered around application of budgets. These have been exercises in frustration. (Principal B)

Clearly and articulately stated from the principals' perspective, "until we have total control of our budget, we will never have total local control as all decisions end up being monetary decisions" (Principal E).

Process and decision-making

Three general areas of concern related to process and decision-making emerged from the principals' text: the time required for consultation and related activities; the role of school councils in decision-making; and the desire for clarity in policy and regulation.

Two issues arose regarding time. The first issue relates to the time principals must spend away from their school involved in tasks previously done by central administration. The following comment is made in reference to the time principals must devote to meetings with other principals in joint decision-making exercises that address jurisdiction wide issues:

> There is a dilemma with the process of shared decision-making. On one hand input from stakeholders is good. However, on the other hand this takes a great deal of time, time away from the very school we're making decisions for. (Principal A)

The second issue relates to the time that it takes to involve parents and staff, and the lack of time that parents and staff have to devote to collaborative efforts:

> With school-based decision-making, school staff is involved in many other "out-of-the-classroom" tasks. Teachers have only so much energy. If some of the energy is directed at tasks away from the classroom, they may be less effective when doing their primary task, teaching.... I do believe the school system has to reflect the educational needs of society, and measurement of what these needs are, has to be taken; a job for Boards and the Government. Parents are busy! (Principal F)

Beyond the frustrations related to time, the majority of principals expressed a desire for greater clarity with regard to the role of school councils in decision-making:

> The formation of school councils had a rocky road… the role they play is still understood differently by many jurisdictions…. In what actual areas are SBM and SBDM allowed and to what extent [principal's emphasis] (Principal C)?

Another principal added:

> I can see where, if I had a school council with a different vision and wants and needs, there would be a continuous power struggle as to who is to lead the process. We must endeavour to facilitate the process whereby all stakeholders are involved but we clearly understand the parameters of our roles. (Principal E)

It is important to note that a number of principals shifted their focus away from their experiences to date and expressed an appreciation for the changes suggested in the draft revision of the district policy (see Appendix F) because it provided greater clarity. As expressed by one principal, "I like both models, the Alberta Learning and [the district], because they are much more black and white [italics added]" (Principal E). The expression of appreciation for "black and white" policy is very consistent with a technical/rational approach to administration. This type of policy clearly and systematically sets out to establish shared definitions for key terms and provides clearly articulated roles for each stakeholder group. In particular, the draft policy referred to articulated the principal's authority and responsibility for school-based decisions as identified in the *School Act* (Alberta Government, 2000). However, even this was insufficient for some of the principals as expressed by one in the comment, "I would like to see in the policy a conceptual flow chart. I, for one, like to see at a glance what the process looks like" (Principal G).

Several principals described the dynamic of shared decision-making at the jurisdictional or centralized level. Provincial regulation requires the direct involvement of principals in decisions that affect all schools. For example, in general the majority of instructional funds must be channelled to schools; therefore, principals must support the allocation of funds to sustain centralized programs or services. The experience of working in the context of trying to balance the often conflicting needs of your school versus the jurisdiction as a whole was described as follows:

> The tension between schools in the deliberations around the centralisation of insufficient dollars brings out the best in us and it brings out the worst in us. We scramble to keep the competitive edge in our schools with the mind set of school councils who see their own community needs as paramount. Yet, we live as a system in a societal structure that demands that we share our resources for the betterment of all children. The conflict results in programs being discarded for the sake of the common good. In the end, time will tell whether the change is good or damaging. The willingness and financial ability of each school on its own will be tested. (Principal D)

The hope within

From the comments and feedback I have received over a decade of studying, implementing, and discussing SBDM, I believe that the description given above is an accurate snapshot of the situation at the time when principals were asked to share their stories. However, given the dynamic living nature of schools, the picture is forever changing and evolving. I must also note that I recognize that there is a correlation between the particular texts selected from the principals' comments, the specific picture painted of the principals' perceptions of SBDM, and my perceptions and experience.

As stated earlier, I have chosen to interpret the principals' responses as an opportunity for opening possibilities. In each text there was an indication of an appreciation for SBDM and a willingness to work towards a more hopeful future. Placing emphasis on these aspects when reviewing the principals' comments may open possibilities:

> In theory, SBDM is a good concept [italics added]; the involvement of those most affected by a decision being part of the decision-making process. However, SBDM has come on stream at a time of diminishing resources in both time and personnel. As a result, true SBDM is not easily implemented and is often seen by the participants as a "requirement" more so than an "asset." (Principal F)

Clearly this principal sees the potential for SBDM, but is discouraged by the timing and method of implementation. How might the possibilities for education leadership change in the context of SBDM as asset rather than requirement?

The focus or intent of SBDM as stated by Alberta Learning is to enhance teaching and learning, yet in practice the focus continues to be on issues of allocation of resources and time. In the present context, what possibilities exist for educational leadership if we were able to refocus local priorities?

The struggle principals appear to be having is between their appreciation for the potential for SBDM and the reality of their lived experience as evident in many of their responses. A principal stated:

> Although some principals and staff may have embraced the concepts of SBDM and SBM [italics added], there was a great deal of anxiety and confusion as to what SBDM/SBM should look like. (Principal H)

In many cases principals may be caught between their desire for consistent direction and structure, and their desire for greater freedom to act locally in the interest of their students and schools. Clearly they race back and forth, confused by the duality of their desires, unable to escape the 'either/or,' and dissatisfied with both perspectives. What are the possibilities for SBDM in the context of this dichotomy of desires or perceived needs? Are there alternate contextual possibilities for reconciling the perceived duality of desires or perceived needs?

Finally, one of the principals that did express their experience in narrative form shared the experience of making major program reforms with a focus on student, school, and community needs. In conclusion the principal stated:

> The student needs were being met, staff was happier, and the community was supportive. All of these changes occurred as a result of input, collaboration, expression of need, a willingness to change, and the contribution of ideas by staff and community. That is site-based decision-making at its finest. Unfortunately, all of these changes occurred before site-based decision-making was adopted as practice within the [school district]. (Principal I)

Paradoxically, the implementation of SBDM-as-policy that was meant to enable a greater amount of community involvement in decisions that most effect students ended up stifling the natural inter-play and dynamic exchange of ideas that existed in the school before its implementation. What lessons are there to be learned from this experience?

Unveiling and Revealing: Ambiguity and Inter-play of Notions

My musical mentors were persistent, they talked of technique; succumbing to the expectations of the composer through a realization of the music as written,

while I had quiet notions of style; anticipation of what the music might reveal as felt.

In those stolen moments between practice and performance, when no one was watching, I would improvise, playing with harmony, dissonance, and syncopation; feeling the music in new ways, ways the composer had perhaps not imagined it could or would be felt. But my mentors did not always appreciate these generative moments of play; my musings were not something that was received with the same degree of enthusiasm as they were shared. My performances were often accompanied with references to composers "rolling over in their final resting places." My patience, the patience of my teacher, and the length of my lessons all became shorter.

However, something strange would occur whenever I came across a difficult passage or phrase, one that I could hear but not transcend. I would return to technique, attempt to master the music through analysis and practice. I was enabled by the very technique that I felt was disabling. It was through the work that my play was enabled, and my desire to play that enabled the work; a dynamic of work and play, not polar opposites nor simple and linear, no clear distinction where one would begin or the other ends, one yet different, ambiguity in play or perhaps at work.

This notion of the interplay between, entwining of, work and play as a way of generating possibility is one of the keys to this study, and is explored further in the interpretation of the conversation with and between principals found in

Chapter 4 and 5. For, in the technical/rational world of modern management practice, it appears that we have lost, or perhaps try to ignore, the generative quality of play that makes life exciting, anew, dynamic. In our efforts to take control of the movement within an organization, we have partitioned, analysed, modelled, and remodelled. Systems are designed and constructed of components with attempts to form linear relationships tied to process and product; flat models that are meant to describe complex and often ambiguous organizational relationships. Consistent with the technical approach to the description of organizations, this systems approach that is rooted in the interpretations of Taylor, Tyler, and all those that have preceded and proceeded them, ignores, forgets, or tries to overcome the unpredictable nature of complex human relationships.

This seduction of management may arise from the need to be in control, driving the desire to break everything down into manageable parts. As explained by Jardine (1992):

> [The] perception of being out of control without technical knowledge, of being "left behind," leads precisely to the anxiety that drives us to relentlessly pursue it, since it is precisely technical knowledge that offers us the promise of relative control. Minuscule obedience to the letter of the law seems to ensure salvation, dividing, and subdividing human life into the smallest possible 'manipulable' and controllable bits. (p. 122)

In this context, the search for possibility inevitably leads to yet another emergent model that redefines the problem and offers an alternative solution:

> Once human life becomes the object of technical-scientific reconceptualization, the difficulties of that life become understandable only as technical problems requiring technical solutions. Being alive becomes something to <u>solve</u>, and finding one's life difficult, ambiguous, or uncertain

> is a mistake to be corrected [italics added]. (Jardine, 1992, p.122)

But experience indicates that with each emergent model a new set of problems surface that beg for still more solutions. One might say that we are caught in the Husserlian world of the "predelineation of experience" as articulated by Caputo (1987):

> The real world is the world which, motivated by actual concatenations of experience, has actually taken shape in experience. And corresponding to this are the real and more or less likely "possibilities" opened up by the actual course which experience takes. Thus the possibility in the primary sense means the experienceable (*erfahrbar*), not merely some abstract, logical possibility... [but] sketched out beforehand, to a more or less complete extent, by the course of actual experience. (p. 44)

Caputo's argument stems from Husserl's notion of "predelineation of experience," which rise out of Husserl's phenomenology that "rejects the idea of a pure given [and understands] intentionally as interpretation" (p. 41). Otherwise stated, "experience takes place only under a subtle structuring and rendering on the part of consciousness which weaves the world into a unity of meaning" (p. 41). From this perspective possibility is limited to the meaning we perceive to fit within our experience. Changes on the horizon of our actual experiences thus simultaneously open and yet limit new possibility:

> The object which is able to appear has been prepared for in advance by the horizons which have been projected beforehand. These objects represent not empty but motivated possibilities whose "essential type" has been predelineated beforehand. (p. 45)

In effect we should not be surprised that models beget models, problems and solutions beget problems and solutions. But what possibilities exist outside

the experience of technical modelling? How might we view and understand the living practice of educational leadership differently?

Heidegger (1950/1977) and others might argue that to escape the limitations of possibilities written on the horizon of experience, it is necessary to escape our technical enframing so that we may see not only our experiences but also our very being differently. But can we ever fully escape that which is so integral to our lives? For example, over the past four years I have consistently argued that there is no truly "educational" model, we have transplanted a business model and superimposed it on the education system. However, about a year ago in conversation with a colleague I caught myself falling into a dualistic 'versus' argument of the importance of differentiating between an 'educational model' and a 'medical model' when developing a special education program. As evident in this lapses, despite all the cogitating, reading, and writing, it appears that I may never be completely free of my technical enframing.

However, I believe that the hope for generative possibility may begin with an awareness of our technical self that changes the way we see the world and provides us with an opportunity to embrace other aspects of our complex composite selves.

As a child there were no bounds, fascinated by mechanics and immersed in the arts, I blended the two to create a world filled with imagination. In my teens I began to separate my worlds, seeing my love for invention and technical design, the joy I found in music, and my quest for spiritual understanding as very separate

and different things, different parts of my life. Again, in my call to education, I have separated my history as a teacher from my history as an administrator, describing myself as a language arts and developmental drama teacher, and as an administrator with expertise in participative management systems. I now recognize what I believe I have intuitively known for some time: We cannot segment ourselves into discrete parts without diminishing the capacity of the whole. My technical, scientific, artistic, and spiritual sides compliment one another to form what I know as the composite 'me.' It is within the interplay of these different intertwining aspects, the in-between place where the conscious-subconscious conversation transpires, that the generative possibilities for self may live. It is in the modulation of the conversation by the technical rationale discourse, the blinders of the predelineation of experience, that the foreclosure[12] of possibility occurs.

But does this hold true for organizations? In the context of SBDM, can educational leadership open the school community to the inter-play of these different complementary aspects? Can educational leadership open the inter-play that leads to generative possibility?

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[12] The notion of "foreclosure" is borrowed from Jardine (1992). He describes, "the problem with technical-scientific discourse [as being that it] has come to pervade the possibility of raising questions…[in such a way that] the language it offers is already foreclosed [italics added]… or longs for such foreclosure… [where] the droning silence of objective presentability finally holds sway over human life" (p. 118).

Like organizations, leadership is often described in terms of the discrete identifiable qualities exhibited by recognized leaders; the qualities and roles of formal and informal leadership are partitioned, categorised, and sub-categorised. Although these tidy identifiable traits locked in a technical metaphysics of presence simplify and facilitate the development of models, they provide only a shallow description of that which most defines leadership, the network of relationships that opens the organization and its members to possibility.

From this perspective leadership is not embodied in the qualities and actions exhibited by any one individual. Rather, it is evident in the energy that surges through a network of relationships, creating new meanings as ideas and notions are changed and re-shaped at each point of contact; a poetic improvisation where prediction is impossible and possibility limited only by imagination.

There appears to be an inherent paradox in describing the complexity of human relationships using the term "organization," which for many implies an orderly or organised structure. However, movement away from the technical or mechanical to an interpretation of organization in terms of an organism as defined in Webster's New World Dictionary as "... anything resembling a living thing in its complexity [italics added] of structure or functions" (1998), may provide an opportunity to open up new possibilities.

Is there an alternative way of de-fining or de-scribing educational leadership outside of a technical system or model? Where is the space that frees us from superimposed limitations that shape a model? Where does the surprising,

imaginative, and unexpected that opens possibilities exit? Where do explosions of creativity give birth to new ideas, expressions, and relationships? What possibilities exist in a world of science that includes quantum physics, chaos theory, and the existence of self-organising structures? Should we be opening ourselves to an understanding of the possibilities that lie in a complex network that blends technology, science, and art?

Revisiting concepts of participative management and shared decision-making from this perspective changes the field of vision dramatically. These questions ask us to reframe our view of SBDM, challenging us to step outside of our systemic view rooted in a specific single dimensional model in the hope of re-visioning SBDM as a space in which a network of educational leadership may spring forth. Leadership is commonly used as both noun and verb; it is an object to have and exhibit, as well as an action. Leadership as an object falls all too easily into the lifeless world of models, but as action it is open to the play of possibility through and within a network of relationships, conduits for opening possibilities.

However, living and playing in this new network of relationships requires a new way of seeing, one perhaps foreign to educational leaders trained through studies and experiences in scientific management.

Method, Intent, and the Search for Hope

In pursuing a re-visioning of educational leadership and SBDM in the context of the questions posed above, it is important to be cautious not to turn "how else" into "how to." As noted earlier the intent of this research is not to develop yet another metanarrative (see pp. 13-14). Therefore one of the most difficult challenges was to find the ambiguous space where methodology might provide a context for participants to explore openings to generative possibilities without being constrained by an imposed method. The hope was to guide, without limiting, participants to previously un-thought of understanding of the central research questions:

> *What local possibilities for educational leadership exist in the context of school-based decision-making as mandated by the Alberta government?*

Creswell (1998) notes that a qualitative study is the best way to engage in "an inquiry process of understanding" (p. 15), pointing out that:

> [By necessity] initial forays into the topic describe what is going on, the topic needs to be explored,... [there is] the need to present a detailed view of the topic... [it will be a] study of individuals in their natural setting... [I am] interest(ed) in writing in a literary style,... [and I will] emphasize the researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an "expert" who passes judgement on participants[author's emphasis]. (pp. 17-18)

Clearly, qualitative research was the most appropriate approach in light of the research question, the desire to be open to new and emergent understandings, and 'deep conversation' that appeared to be required to open possibilities.

However, the selection of a research method or tradition proved to be considerably more difficult.

In search of methodology

Possibility emerges in the most extraordinary places. As I read, the flood of thoughts and ideas inspired by each word, phrase, passage and essay imploded in frustration, becoming lost or buried in the ocean of yet other emergent thoughts inspired by the next words, phrases, passages, and essays. But what was happening in this swirl of notions and frustration? Possibility unnoticed unrealized stared back at me with an impish grin.

From Doll's (1997) notion of "winging it," emerged new found understanding and inspiration. Doll writes:

> In one sense I 'wing it,' I read with [author's emphasis] my students these new texts I insist on teaching, in the knowing that discovering meaning together is action research. I tell my students that there are no experts, just intelligent minds operating on a text.... This strategy... frees the discussion in refreshing ways. (p. 2)

With the simple phrase "discovering meaning together is action research" Doll opens possibility to something to be discovered, even released or revealed, through our relationship with others.

In the awakening of my scientific and artistic selves, I recognized the importance of exploring educational leadership in the context of SBDM with colleagues, allowing the unfolding of the research as a shared experience. But it was through the reading of this simple, almost obvious, passage that I began the

process of letting go of the technical self that drove the mechanical need to constitute the exact parameters of my research.

Intuitively, I was being called to action research, but as yet I had not understood that action research "requires more than an 'application' of research methods.... [but is] a lived practice that requires the researcher [to] provide some account of the way in which the investigation both shapes and is shaped by the investigator" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xiii). I was disquieted by the call, my discomfort rooted in ignorance fed on what I soon recognized as an over simplification of the concept as reflective practice, or perhaps more precisely, technical reflection on "prescriptive practice" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xv). From this perspective, reflective practice is rooted in an examination of what we do, the product, and how we do it, the process, and I could not fathom how this would open possibilities for educational leadership as suggested by the central research question.

I soon discovered that the living practice of action research, in consideration of self and other, enriches and adds to the complexity of our interpretation of experience through an examination of the relationships between producer, process, and product. Carson and Sumara's (1997) notion of interpretation involves the understanding that "one's evolving sense of identity and one's daily practices must always be, in some way, interpreted in relation to one another" (p. xv). Carson and Sumara describe the interpretive effect it this way:

> When we write we are written. Writing reveals a writer who did not exist, in the same form, before the act of writing. This does not mean to suggest that examining the product of holistic practices [like writing] reveals the producer but, rather, that holistic practices are ones in which process, producer, and product are cospecified. Although any component of these three can be examined and understood without knowledge of the other, a deeper interpretation occurs when the relations among them are made available for interpretation. (p. xv)

In the opening to the richness and sense of purpose that action research offers, I no longer needed to feed the illusion that I could and/or must channel the research. I was beginning to understand that generative possibilities for educational leadership, original possibilities that lie beyond the predelineation of experience, are found in the unfolding of the research experience rather than in a rigid structuring of method. This is not meant to deny the need for method or a theoretical framework as will be seen in the proceeding chapters, but to recognize that method should not limit or restrict generative possibilities.

But how might generative possibility be discovered or revealed?

Action research, hermeneutics, and professional conversation

As evident in the principals' stories in the calls for more structure, policy, and even flow charts, there may be disquiet and discomfort with unpredictable possibility. There appears to be a tendency to cling to models that seemingly simplify existence and claim the predictable, ignoring or perhaps ignorant of "the original difficulty of life" (Caputo, 1987, p. 1). From here I returned to the question: Where is the space that frees us from models, responding to the contradiction and ambiguity found in the principals' experiences described earlier?

My earlier call for the recognition of complexity of human nature is reflective of Caputo's call for recognition of the original difficulty of life:

> The point is to make life difficult, not impossible – to face up to the differences and difficulty which enter into what we think and do and hope for, not grind it to a halt.... We get the best result by yielding to the difficulty in 'reason,' 'ethics,' and 'faith,' not by trying to cover it over. (p. 7)

Caputo's reference to "not... trying to cover it over" is an invitation to engage in radical hermeneutics; an interpretive act that is suspicious of interpretations that seek the easy way out by "passing over into assertion" or that are devoid of "authentic self-understanding" (p. 73).

Gadamer (1976) defines hermeneutics as a process by which we, as interpreters, transcend our own horizons [the limits of our experience] by entering into a dialogue with a text that pulls the text[13] beyond its original horizons [the initial intentionally in the text], and the text in saying something new pulls us beyond our present horizon. Gadamer speaks of the fusion of horizons, however, within the "inner infinity of the dialogue" (p. 17) between interpreter and text a complete merging never occurs, this is a reference to the hermeneutic circle, the spiral questioning of interpreter of text and text of interpreter. Before entering into the dialogue, as interpreters we must first recognize the

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[13] Gadamer (1976) uses the term "text" in the widest possible sense, it includes all forms of written or spoken language.

> prejudices[14] that constitute the initial directedness of our ability to experience, [which are] simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us. (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9)

This means that while engaging in hermeneutic inquiry one must begin by understanding the prejudices that will influence the interpretive process. Gadamer (1976) further describes the "hermeneutical experience [as being] possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true" (p. 9). But in an effort to open up the new and the different, Gadamer calls upon imagination to play a role in our conversation with the text:

> It is imagination [*Phantasie*] that is the decisive function of the scholar. Imagination naturally has a hermeneutical function and serves the ability to expose real, productive questions. (p.12)

Imagination carries our understanding beyond our present horizon and the horizon of the text through the "ability to see what is questionable" (p. 13), in this way imagination opens generative possibilities, new and previously unexplored possibilities for educational leadership.

Drawing on Gadamer's interpretation of Heidegger, Slattery (1995) presents an understanding of the notion of a hermeneutic circle. He explains that a "postmodern philosophical hermeneutics" will

> validate text interpretation that arises from the dialogue of individuals working within the context of a community circle where the other, whether

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[14] Gadamer (1976) uses the term "prejudices" in a way that is akin to Heidegger's (1962) use of "fore-structures." Gadamer uses "prejudice" as a positive concept that identifies the initial way we view our experiences. He believes that it is our prejudices "that constitutes our being." (p. 9)

> human person, tradition, or artifact, is experienced as a 'Thou' and not an 'it'... the hermeneutic circle is used to facilitate understanding and open possibilities. (p. 113)

It was within this notion of a hermeneutic circle that I found a space that I thought might provide a context for participants to explore openings to generative possibilities without being constrained by an imposed method.

Linking back to the context of action research, this seems to suggest that generative possibility for educational leadership may live within the collective creative imagination of a hermeneutic circle, or as described earlier, within a leadership network of relationships as a poetic improvisation that opens possibility.

Nachmanovitch (1990) suggests that improvisation is the culmination of education, training, and experience emerging in a series of questions and answers that create a "form unfolding" (p. 102). In contrast to the quest for the correct or final answer that characterises the problem-solving models of modern management practice, improvisation is rooted in problem-setting[15] as an infinite series of questions and answers that set the stage for emergent possibilities. At each point of contact as responses are selected they affect the possibilities for the next point of contact. Nachmanovitch describes this improvisation:

> In a piece of music, the opening chord, drone, or rhythm instantly generates expectations that generate questions that in turn feed the next bit of the

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[15] This refocusing on problem-setting over problem-solving recognises the significance of the question over the response, but it also recognises the question frames the response. (Gadamer 1976 and Bleakley, 2000)

> music. Once the musician has played something, anything at all, the next thing fits to that, or fits against it; a pattern is there to be reinforced, or modulated, or broken.... The first selections of tones are very free, but as we continue, the selections we have made affect the selections we will [author's emphasis] make. A blank canvas or piece of paper is "without form, and void" (Genesis 1:2) but a single mark on it sets up a definite world and poses an infinite series of creative [possibilities]. (p. 103)

With each answer improvisation invites yet other emergent questions, encouraging the unpredictable response. "Mistakes and accidents, or gifts of sheer inspiration, can enter at any time to fertilize the process with fresh information. [Events] flow on through all these changes, incorporating and assimilating them as it goes" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 104). Rather than closure or resolution, rest becomes a matter of choice made by participants, done in the recognition and understanding that the improvisation could continue. There are always other notes to be played or brush strokes to be made, and all it takes is the insistence or urging of a participant or intruder.

The proposal was that the research partners would engage in what I have termed within the study as a "professional conversation." As Carson (1986) points out:

> Hermeneutic interpretation begins not with direct research into the problem, but with an uncovering of the question to which the problem statement is an answer. The process is inherently conversational in that the participants in the conversation seek to deepen their understanding of the topic of conversation itself. (p. 76)

Gadamer (1975) and Carson (1996) note that conversation occurs when participants resist engaging in one-upmanship in an effort to out-argue one another and seriously engage in active listening, weighing and considering the opinions of

their colleagues. In this way they open their opinions and the opinions of their partners to questioning. The notion of professional conversation draws on this definition and refers specifically to conversations between and amongst professionals that is as free as possible from competition for resources; conversations that opens one's experiences and opinions and those of colleagues to questioning, testing, and play in the hope of generating new possibilities.

Key to the ability of professional conversation to open generative possibilities are the notions of questioning, testing, and play. As Carson (1986) notes, "hermeneutic inquiry begins with an attempt to understand the question itself... referred to [by Gadamer (1975)] as 'the hermeneutical priority of the question'" (p. 76). The notion of "testing" is directly related to questioning but speaks more to the testing of our assumptions and beliefs, the fore-structures or prejudices that influence our interpretations that lead to understandings. Through questioning and testing we are able to, as Bleakley (2000) suggests, "interrogate their epistemological underpinnings" (p. 14). For example, in the context of this study, it is essential to question the nature and affect of the use of business language on education.

Finally, "play" carries our questioning and testing beyond interrogation to an opening of generative possibility. It is within the play that possibilities for "How else can it be?" may live. It is with the play of creative imagination as expressed above as improvisation that the hermeneutic experience may give birth to generative possibility.

The notion that conversation may lead to generative possibilities is essential to moving professional conversation beyond mere means for data collection. As Carson (1986) notes:

> The idea of application is central to hermeneutics in that it is an integral and necessary part of the interpretive process.... To apply conversation as a mode of research means to understand and commit oneself to a communal venture of understanding.... The conversations allow the participants to refect on the meaning of [their] practice as it manifests itself in their experiences. (p. 82)

Given my life experiences with my background in developmental drama[16] and participative management systems with their focus on collaboration and communication, I was intuitively drawn to conversation as a means of conducting action research. Initially it was Caputo's (1987) *Radical Hermeneutics* that first captured my imagination with its calling to open conversation to competing viewpoints, making every attempt to ensure that no one is excluded, that the powerful do not monopolize the debate so as to manipulate, restrain or suppress the views of others; radical hermeneutics plays on the stage of "professional conversation" as described above. In Chapter 5 I explore further Caputo's radical hermeneutics as means to interpret our conversations as research partners.

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[16] Developmental drama is a concept developed by Brian Way in his book Development Through Drama (1967) that gained popularity in the 1970's. It is a reference to the use of the practical experience of drama to enhance educational practice. Beyond the use of drama as a means for instruction, drama techniques such as improvisation and presentation are used to enhance students' communication skills.

It is important to recognize that conversation is social engagement rooted in language, and it is language that shapes who we are and how we see the world. As Gadamer (1976) states, "language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world" (p. 3). Language is a way of revealing, a way of revealing our prejudices to ourselves and to others through the act of interpretation leading to understanding.

Earlier in this chapter, I attempted to identify how the language of business has come to dominate our way of thinking about and seeing education, and further enframes our very way of being as educators, as exemplified in the notion of SBDM as *Ge-stell*. It may be possible to say that the language of business has created a dominant metaphor, or as I will refer to in this study a meta-metaphor. Meta-metaphor is a notion that is akin to the meta-narrative , a "univocal discourse" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xx) with it's claim to represent a final truth or as Lyotard (1984) defines them, "narrations with a legitimating function" (p. 19). The language of the business meta-metaphor, the dominant metaphor within society which shapes way we think and converse about education, has the ability to limit or shut down the conversation by silencing dissonance.

For this reason, it should be recognized that professional conversation as a mode of action research is not without risk, it invites research partners to question and challenge one another's previously unchallenged interpretations and understandings; the research group was being asked to challenge the meta-metaphor of business. Carson (1986) explains this challenge as follows:

> The questioning is a matter of personal commitment and reflection on what one should do. These studies centrally concern how to conduct one's personal and professional life as a curriculum scholar. In this sense, conversation is a moral discourse among colleagues who are members of the community... [a] mutual questioning of a commonly shared world within which one acts as an educator. (p. 78-79)

Similarly, as educational leaders, the research partners were asked to challenge the appropriateness of the business metaphor as the meta-metaphor in education. As will be seen in Chapter 5, the improvisational play of conversation eventually led the group to engage in play with an alternate metaphor, a musical metaphor rooted in jazz. It was in the language play with this alternate metaphor we began to explore possibilities for educational leadership. The alternate metaphor allowed the research partners to reframe their thinking about educational leadership in a language that was "normally not used in their everyday routine at their workplaces" (Thaler & Somekh, et al., 1997, p. 316). However, it must be noted that it was not the aim of the research to replace the meta-metaphor of business with an alternate metaphor, for this would be replacing one meta-narrative with another.

The research presented in this dissertation was founded on the hope that professional conversation might carry the research partners beyond our present horizons by opening our previously unquestioned experiences and assumptions to questioning and testing and perhaps more ambitiously, through the creative capacity of imaginative play, create a space where we might generate new possibilities for education leadership.

Chapter 3: Nature of the Research / In Search of Possibilities

Within the opening chapters of this text I offer a series of brief glimpses into my past, that I will call "critical rememberings," as a way of paralleling my personal journey and the group action research with-in this text.

The intent of these narrative glimpses is to provide a setting for "critical and personal 'reflexivity' where both the form of writing and the status of the author are interrogated and problematised" (Bleakley, 2000, p. 11). They are meant to be a creative way of interrogating my past and opening to questioning the fore-structures or prejudices that influence my interpretations; they are an attempt to open my past to Caputo's (1987) "authentic self-understanding" (p. 73). Through the use of "storying," a "problem-setting approach that is fundamentally aesthetic… a practical artistry" (Bleakley, 2000, p. 15) I hope to reveal previously un-interrogated facets of my identity, as opposed to constructing an identity through a technical-rational factual telling. Most importantly these narratives are not meant to be as Bleakley (2000) describes a "confessional practice with its introspective gaze, and anecdotal, value-laden expression, [or] personally therapeutic" (p. 13). Rather, in recognition that "language itself constitutes subjectivities in its performative usage" (p. 15), these critical rememberings are meant to:

> Constitute an approach that appreciates the value especially of written language's inherent indeterminacy, and thus resists or subverts notions of closure, as explanation, in reflective practice. (p.15)

The act of critical remembering is not in itself action research. Critical remembering leads to action research when in the interrogation of experience it reveals meaning and generates new meaning within the sharing between the research partners. However, it is not simply the act of sharing that opens meaning, but sharing with the intent to open forward actions and considerations to possibility.

Action research of this nature "urges us to reject the fiction that we can detach ourselves and become merely objective observers of educational situations… and move toward a deeper appreciation of various dimensions of "the topic of study" (Carson, 1996, p. 111). In this spirit of action "research for education rather than research about [italics added] education" (p. 105), the study began with the notion of a hermeneutic circle as noted earlier (Slattery, 1995). The research group as a community of interpreters was to engage in an interrogation and interpretation of their experiences as educators and principals as they relate to educational leadership; in essence they consider the questions of "What is it?" and "Why is it like that?" However, beyond these initial questions that interpret the local context, the hope was that they would extend their interpretation to consider the question of "How else can it be?"

Finding Research Partners

An initial general call to participate in this research was made via e-mail to all school principals in the school jurisdiction, rather than approaching principals

in person either individually or as a group. The less personal e-mail contact was used so that principals would not feel obligated by my role as Superintendent to participate in the proposed research and they would not be intimidated by peers into participating or not participating as might happen in a group situation. From this general invitation, a total of seven school principals expressed an interest in the study.

Participation was negotiated individually with each principal and mutually agreed to based on the following criteria:

- An interest in exploring the central research question, "What local possibilities for educational leadership exist in the context of school-based decision-making as mandated by the Alberta government?"
- An interest in exploring the ambiguity that was evident in the principals' stories of their implementation of SBDM.
- A willingness to commit time to the research process, beginning with a reading of the full research proposal prior to the first meeting of the research group.
- Most importantly, openness and readiness to work with me as a researcher in light of my position at the time as Superintendent of Schools.

Consent to use principals' contributions to the research was obtained through letters signed by each principal and myself as the researcher (see Appendix I).

As a result of these individual conversations two of the seven principals decided that they could not commit to the research, which left five principals and myself as the research partners. Eventually, one principal withdrew because of the time that had to be committed for the sessions. This is discussed further in the section on ethical considerations (see p. 73).

Prior to engaging in the research there were significant relationships between the members of the research group that had been developed from years of working together. In two cases, members of the group had worked with one another in a principal and vice-principal relationship. These relationships contributed in several ways to the dynamics within the research group. For the most part, it created greater comfort and trust within the research group. However, on another level with one particular pairing it limited their ability to listen to one another as they anticipated each other's stories, comments, and responses. In some very few cases, there was a slight air of subordination when the individual whom had been the Principal in the earlier relationship disagreed with their familiar partner.

Many of the details of these relationships and other specific facts or characteristics that may reveal the identity of the individual research partners evident in the conversational texts are not included in the interpretations that follow in an effort to preserve anonymity. Unfortunately, avoiding these details also may limit the ability to fully provide the context for certain comments, thus limiting somewhat the richness of the contributions of my research partners.

A Question of Practice

Action research is rooted in the recognition of a question of practice that requires not only further examination but also a need to alter practice. This need is then validated through a reconnaissance; an exploratory survey or examination of the existing situation as it contributes to and/or necessitates research leading to a change in practice.

The ambiguity and subsequent visible discomfort of principals as exposed in their stories and interpretations of their lived experiences described earlier (see Chapter 2, pp. 27-33) constituted the need to explore the central research question. Born of this reconnaissance with principals, the purpose of the study was to enter into professional conversation in an attempt to open the group's (principals and myself) practice of educational leadership to new possibilities in the context of SBDM as mandated by the Alberta government. In essence, the study was an attempt to explore principals' practice of educational leadership through professional conversation that asks them to question their notions of possibility, educational leadership, and SBDM.

The hope was that this questioning would begin with the introduction of what for most would be relatively new concepts: post-modernism, issues related to globalization, improvisation in life and art, and others. The aim was to provide the research partners with an opportunity to move beyond reflection on practice into a blending of theory into practice through a cycle of reading, relating the reading to

their experiences, sharing understandings, engaging in interpretive dialogue, acting, and returning to share their new experiences and understandings.

The Study as Action Research

Action research can be categorised into four general orientations: technical, practical, critical, and post-structural (Carson, 1989). No single orientation completely describes the conversations, interpretations, and any resulting changes in practice that comprise this study.

In the course of our conversations, all of the research partners made references to theoretical literature we had and were reading based on our various interests. These references were used to inform our conversation and stimulate further exploration, but they were never our focus as implied in the theoretical approach to action research (Carson, 1989).

The study can not be considered to be practical action research as we were not focused on making specific clearly identified changes in our practice; we were not attempting to identify "this" or "that" particular possibility for our practice of educational leadership. Yet, unique and individual changes did occur within our practice as a result of our participation in the study.

As stated earlier (see Chapter 2, p. 14), part of the intent of the study was to critique SBDM by pointing out "what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest" (Foucault, 1988, p. 154). However, critical action research focuses on

a critique of the sociopolitical context of our institutions. While our group wrestled with many of the sociopolitical issues that surround our schools, this was not the specific focus of our conversation.

Jennings and Graham (1996) state that in the context of theoretical, practical, and critical action research "the resolution of problems is often given priority over the desire to question, even though resolutions only result in new questions" (p. 273). In contrast, post-structural action research focuses on "the need to struggle without end or resolution, indeed to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct meaning in 'making sense' of the world" (p. 273). Post-structural action research examines "the tensions between theory and practice; among the ambiguities, tensions and conflicts in our own understanding of ourselves and others; as well as the language within which all such matters are cast and sedimented" (Houtekamer, Chambers, Yamagishi, and Striker, 1997).

If asked to locate this study in relation to the four types of action research outlined above, I would have to say that the research may be most comfortable within a post-structural space; recognising that the study also encompasses and moves between the other action research locations. However, in consideration of my research partners and the fact that we did not within our conversations attempt to situate the study within any one tradition, I will leave the interpretation of the study's action research location open, and focus on the more general qualities, elements, and conditions that lend to action research.

Action research implies certain conditions that inform the research, set the context, and provide the initial structure for the unfolding of the study. These tenuous conditions that are shaped and reshaped by the research partners throughout the study are key as the opening cords that will set the improvisation as form unfolding in motion. Key to the notion of the research being 'for education,' is the ability to respond to the needs of the research partners and the direction chosen by the group. Biott (1996) points out that:

> Projects cannot be pre-planned very far ahead and, as facilitators or supervisors of action research projects usually learn, it is inappropriate to expect projects to be confined to predetermined goals. As projects unfold, questions are often reformulated and new ones emerge. Interests are re-shaped, foci shift, and observations or findings are frequently combined with self-revelation including practitioners' sense of the emerging force of their own newly established identities as researchers. (p. 171)

This does not mean that the study must take-on a laissez faire, *ad libitum*, nature. As with any good improvisation, the underlining structure must be ever present without participants allowing it to repress possibility. A violin's four strings of only thirteen inches creates a confined space and finite number of notes within which music can be played, but within the limited structure there are almost limitless possibilities for the composer. In life and art there are limitless examples of infinite possibility within a finite structure (Nachmanovitch, 1990, pp. 85-86).

Summary of the Research Sessions

The study paralleled the annual planning cycle for the school jurisdiction and schools, approximately a five-month period from February 29th to July 3rd.

One of the most frustrating aspects of the study was trying to bring the group together; finding times where everyone was available was extremely challenging. The intended six sessions were impossible to arrange and had to be reduced to four sessions. However, sessions were much longer than anticipated lasting generally between three and a half to four hours for a total of approximately thirteen hours of conversation. Time limits were never set for sessions and the group would sense natural endings to each session. On several occasions when it seemed that a session was moving towards a natural end someone would make an additional comment, which would spur on another round of open conversation. Consequently, sessions generated lengthy complex texts rich in content and possibilities for interpretation. Members of the group challenged each other's beliefs, understandings, and notions, forcing deeper reflection on issues. The fact that each session lasted longer than anticipated and were so rich in content was a testament to the commitment of the group to the study and the topic.

In an effort to set a tone or climate that enhanced open dialogue, the sessions were held on 'neutral' ground away from the working environment of the school jurisdiction or the principals' schools. The principals openly stated that they enjoyed the comfortable setting of my home, and expressed a tremendous amount of appreciation for the meals and general atmosphere.

Process unfolding

As the researcher with a vested interest in the study, I had to learn to resist urges to take control of the sessions. For all my good intentions to allow the process to unfold, initially I over-planned the sessions in an attempt to ensure that I would be able to extract data for interpretation (Appendix G). It was in sharing my draft process for the first session with my advisor that I was able to see the inherent need for control.

After some initial awkwardness, each of us took ownership for the process, taking it in many unforeseeable directions. Although a written suggested process was provided for each session (Appendix H), sessions were never limited by these guidelines. Together, on an ongoing basis, the group decided on the topics, direction, and the frequency of group sessions, a process of form unfolding. The group decided that before sessions began there would be an 'open space' of about fifteen minutes, which was not recorded, where group members could just generally catch-up on events. For the next hour to hour and a half we would review transcripts, sketch out the session from the proposed plan, and begin to converse. We would then move to the dining room, and continue our conversations over a long leisurely dinner. After dinner we remained at the table and continued our conversations with coffee, tea, and desert.

Conversations took on a life of their own, and we moved freely from topic to topic unlimited and uninhibited by the proposed process. Group members noted this on several occasions and they wondered how I would select and sort through

all the conversation with its various twists and turns. On at least two occasions I had to confess that I was not sure, about half way through Session 1 and again about two thirds of the way into Session 4.

There were several aspects of the study that did not unfold as proposed. Although encouraged repeatedly, the principals did not avail themselves of the opportunity to access additional reading to enrich their understanding of notions such as post-modernity and hermeneutics. I believe that this was more a function of time than desire. However, throughout the study they frequently referred to readings they had done or were doing for other purposes. Throughout the sessions the principals did ask for clarification or explanation of some of the key concepts. For example, the notion of post-modernity was revisited on several occasions.

Three phases of the study

There were basically three phases to the study: phase one, the introduction and initial bringing together of the group; phase two, the open general sessions; and phase three, concluding/not concluding conversation.

Phase one of the study occurred during the first half of the initial meeting of the group. I began with a brief overview of the proposed research, addressing the notions of post-modernity, action research, and the idea of keeping a "common

place book"[17] with the group. The group started to understand how the study was action research but, for the most part, the notion of the post-modern remained something of a mystery. The research partners, somewhat reluctantly, agreed to contribute to a common place book. Finally, in this initial phase, we discussed some of the mechanics of generally how we should proceed, frequency of sessions, location, and possible topics. It was agreed that we would try to meet approximately four times, every five to six weeks; we would continue to meet in my home, as long as I would agree to continue to provide dinner; and topics would be decided from session to session based on the conversation as it unfolded.

Phase two unexpectedly began during the first session shortly after dinner. As part of the opening session, I had decided to end the session with a story of a key experience as a principal with SBDM so that the other members of the research team might be motivated to script their own stories and share them at the next session. Rather than ending the session, it opened a round of spontaneous story telling, where three of the other members of the group shared a key or extremely significant experience they had had with SBDM. The open general

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[17] The notion of a "common place book" was introduced by Dr. Terry Carson and Dr. George Richardson as part of their EDSE 606: Action Research course at University of Alberta. It is borrowed from the film "The English Patient." A common place book consists of narratives, thoughts, reflections, observations, notes, memos, and other materials or artifacts related to participants' exploration of the central research question.

conversations of phase two continued throughout the second and third session and comprised more than three-quarters of the thirteen hours of conversation.

The third phase of the study consisted of the fourth group session. During the session group members were asked to gather and share their thoughts regarding:

- changes in their understanding of the central research question;
- the affect of their participation in the study on their practice,
- the strengths and/or weaknesses of the study and how similar studies might be enhanced in the future; and
- possibilities for their further personal and professional development that come from their participation in the research.

This session was shorter and more structured than the previous three sessions, and ended with a relaxing group dinner with spouses and partners to thank them for their patience throughout the process.

Data Collection

As anticipated, written and recorded data were collected from group sessions and recordings were transcribed and provided to the research partners for confirmation, reflection, and interpretation. However, the group felt and agreed that discussion related to the research should be limited to the group sessions. The feeling was that it was important to separate the research from our day-to-day operations. This is not to say that the research did not impact action in the

workplace, quite the contrary. This aspect will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

The group's initially reluctant agreement to contribute to the development of a shared common place book reflected their commitment to the activity, which diminished with each session. Although we all faithfully brought items, but there was little interest or desire to elaborate in any detail as to the reason they had selected a particular item.

The most appreciated part of the sessions was the opportunity to share stories and to discuss and interpret their significance. These stories and sharing of experiences formed the foundation for the interpretive process founded on professional conversation as described earlier (see Chapter 2, p. 48-50).

Ethical Considerations

Given the unfolding unpredictable nature of action research, a discussion of the ethics of the study must be broader than setting rules to avoid harm. Ethical considerations have to reflect the potential impact, positive and/or negative, that engaging in the action research might have on the research partners. Going into the study every participant had to recognize the possibility that this action research could lead to empowerment, emancipation, and success, as easily as it could lead to conflict, disruption, and disturbance. This is not an issue of manipulating the specifics of the research so participants might experience a range of perceived emotional states. Rather, it is an issue of ensuring that both before and throughout

the research process the research partners are sensitised to the potential for a variety of eventualities, the most potent of which is the potential for disruption. This in itself is a form of empowerment that allows each research partner to make conscious choices as to how they will engage in the study.

The potential for disruption

Engaging in action research is a direct attempt to influence living practice in an effort to bring about material improvements. From this perspective, it is important to recognize the impact of acting locally with research partners that are part of one's work team, and the possible disruption or disturbance this action may create. As noted earlier, above and beyond the potential for changes in process and product, there exists the potential for change in the producer. Therefore, there existed the possibility that participants would experience changes that may make it difficult or uncomfortable returning to and living within their work environment; there was the possibility that others may be insensitive to or intolerant of their changing understandings.

However, the very point of the study was to liberate participants from the belief that there is a "right way" to conduct SBDM. Focusing on the local opens the doors for the shared unmasking of ideological distortion in an attempt to escape the metanarrative of SBDM as imposed through policy and regulation, and

exposes undiscovered possibility; a type of "remembering forward"[18] (Carson, 1992). Blades (1997), through reference to Foucault, reinforces the importance of liberating participants and unmasking ideological distortion, taking the researcher beyond mere recognition of the act to ethical obligation:

> If... freedom means being able to break from the destining of enframing, and if this enframing is made possible through the dynamic nexus of truth, knowledge, and power, then intellectuals not only may play a role in deconstructing truth in discourse, intellectuals must [author's emphasis] be involved in a critical, post-modern deconstructive research if change is to happen. (p. 118)

Finally, for this unmasking to take root in the research partners' living practice, we had to find ways to integrate the new-found possibilities into our lives without alienating those around us. This issue was addressed in a conversation during our final session. Each member of the group was able to note changes in their thinking and actions that may not have occurred had they not been involved in the study. These notions are revisited in following chapters, as it is not enough to think and act, we must also reflect on the meaning of these thoughts and actions.

Reconciling roles: The Superintendent - Principal relationship

From the outset it was essential to recognize that the Superintendent of Schools and principals live in a power relationship. The Superintendent exercises

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[18] Carson (1992) uses the notion of "remembering forward" [adapted from Caputo's (1987, p. 263) notion of "repeating forward"] to refer to the need to interpret practice through discourse with others to "unfold a possibility" (p. 113); hence remembering [interpreting practice] forward [opening possibilities].

power over the principals through the ability and responsibility to evaluate performance, designate assignments, and assign resources. But perhaps more significantly the Superintendent influences the community image of the principals through the way in which these responsibilities are exercised. For example, a change in assignment can be perceived as a promotion or a demotion. However, perhaps less obvious is the power that a Principal can exercise over the Superintendent. Principals in their daily contact with parents, students, community members, and staff equally have an ability to influence the community image of the Superintendent.

The most significant consideration that I had to address was the potential for conflict in the intertwining of roles; that of a researcher engaged in collegial relationships and that of Superintendent of Schools with supervisory functions.

In the context of action research that has the potential to change or alter professional practice, it was inevitable that our roles as research partners and professional colleagues would intertwine. The key is in the notion of a collegial relationship; a familiarity that allows for open and honest conversation less influenced by hidden agendas or ulterior motives. It is essential that each research partner, and in particular myself as researcher-Superintendent, actively support and balance authentic respect for the interchange of ideas, notions, and experiences.

This type of relationship does not suddenly begin as a function of the research, although it may be enhanced by the research. It is a process built on the

previous experience of colleagues with the Superintendent. This does not mean that the relationship with each principal prior to the research must be pleasant or jovial. Rather, it is important that prior relationships are characterized as open and honest, and most importantly that they are founded on trust. Without this foundation upon which to build the research partnership, conversation will never get to the 'soft underbelly' of experience where sharing and reflection have the greatest potential to generate meaningful professional conversation.

This goes to another key issue for both Superintendent and principals. Our most meaningful experiences usually include those that have been the most joyous and the most painful and sharing these makes us vulnerable. There is an inherent risk to this type of sharing that without trust becomes riskier. Colleagues that expose their weaknesses must be able to trust that they will remain within the group and not be used outside of the research and that confidentiality will be respected faithfully.

All of us as research partners at one time or another in the research shared some very intimate details of our experiences and the feelings that accompanied them. We also expressed our appreciation for the opportunity to share these experiences without fear of betrayal. During the final session the group discussed this issue, and in closing the conversation noted the uniqueness of the experience. Carson (1986) addresses this issue of trust-betrayal in this way:

> Direct contact in ongoing conversation should produce a greater trust between researcher and practitioner, but the responsibility is greater too. The potential for harm to the practitioner is very real should this trust be

violated.

In this passage, Carson is referring to the researcher-practitioner relationship in a university and school collaborative action research project. However, I believe that the same holds true in the collaborative action research relationship between Superintendent and Principal, and perhaps more so given the Superintendent-Principal power relationship where there is often little or no opportunity to discontinue the relationship without severing the lines of employment.

Therefore, organizational leaders that wish to draw from this research must recognize that these localised relationships and results live in the combined experience of this particular group of people. It can never be an issue of replication; research of this type, where supervisors engage staff in collegial professional conversation, will each produce unique experiences built on previous relationships and local generative possibilities.

There were no simple or obvious steps that could be taken to establish clear and distinctive lines that separate researcher-Supervisor functions. There were no ethics or principles to operationalize that would guarantee that these roles would not intrude upon one another. Like the mixing of warm and cool air that creates a disorientating distorting fog, no matter how tactful or careful we were, it was inevitable that our researcher/participant and Supervisor/subordinate roles would intermingle. However, even an awareness of this likelihood made us better prepared for the experience.

Once the intrusive nature of our various roles were understood, the success of the study depended on participants "collaboration, as opposed to mere cooperation" (Carson, 1996, p. 15). Carson distinguishes these as follows:

> While we cooperate, we are like guests in one another's homes, appreciative, polite, careful to mind our manners. In collaboration, we become more familiar with one another, less like guests and more responsible for solving common problems. (p. 15)

He goes on to note that,

> Within collaborative relationships... conventional understanding of ethics fails us, (for ethics are) ...caught in the bind of creating general rules to handle what is essentially individual and specific. (pp. 15-16)

What remains, as suggested by Carson (1996) from his reading of Caputo, is obligation, which opens "ethics to the inevitable difficulties of life" (p. 18). As we moved beyond cooperation to collaboration, obligation formed within the self towards others; this "obligation is not something produced by a subject, but rather something produced in [italics added] me" (p. 17) through my relationships with others. Therefore, while living in the fog that inevitably emerges in collaborative relationships, obligation had to serve as our beacon.

However, some tangible measures were taken to facilitate the exercise of obligation. Prior to engaging in the research it was important to:

- emphasize that "there are no experts, just intelligent minds operating on a text...[in an attempt to] free the discussion in refreshing ways" (Doll, 1997, p. 2);

- provide an environment that is conducive to open conversation, where principals can share their readings, experience, and resulting interpretations, without negative criticisms and/or repercussions; and
- ensure that principals feel that they can withdraw from the research without criticism and/or repercussion should conflict arise that they find disquieting.

As noted earlier, this final point was tested during the study. It quickly became evident that the time commitment for one of the five principals was too great. This Principal attended one of the four sessions, remaining for approximately two hours. This Principal's contributions at this one session were appreciated by all, and during the final session when we talked about the time commitment, we all expressed understanding for the difficulty meeting the commitment and regret that this Principal could not have participated more.

It was not until we were negotiating the timing of the last session that the Principal finally withdrew officially from the research. The intent was always to attend, but other demands made it increasingly difficult to participate. Prior to this Principal's withdrawal from the research, we had a conversation where I made a point of reassuring the Principal that, as promised when negotiating participation, there was no need for concern that either the research or their place as a member of the school jurisdiction team would suffer.

Being cognisant the power relationship, from a very pragmatic perspective, I also had to be sure that none of the principals were undergoing performance

evaluations or slated for a possible move to a new position or school during the annual planning cycle, as these would increase the possibility for misinterpretation by both participants and other members of staff not involved in the research.

It is important to note that this was not new or foreign territory, for as a Superintendent, one is always balancing collegial/supervisory relationships through obligation. However, the added element of my role as researcher did most assuredly bring new emergent understandings of these complex-intertwining relationships, which I hope will be evident as the text unfolds with the interpretations presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

In summary, essential to negotiating the participation of principals in the study was an explanation of both the potential for personal disruption, as well as, the potential for conflict arising from our dual researcher/participant and Superintendent/Principal roles.

Expressing these cautions as we prepared and moved into the study was relatively simple; the noble articulation of warnings takes little effort. However, living the reality behind the words can be more challenging. As was inevitable, there were moments in the early stages of the study where body language and brief moments of hesitation indicated that not all were comfortable with everything that was being said and revealed. But these moments faded over time. This is not to say that they disappeared completely, but moments of discomfort became infrequent and shorter and over time often such moments led to laughter as we realised that often we had all had similar or equally compromising experiences.

Likewise, there were occasions where we brought our work with us to sessions. This also was inevitable, given that it was our lived experiences of work that formed and informed most of the foundation for our conversations. As was anticipated, not all of the interactions that took place amongst members of the research group at work were positive. But to our credit, we appeared to be able to put these away and engage in the professional conversation that was so key to the study.

Exercising the ethics of obligation within the interactions of the study had a natural rooting in our daily experiences as educators. However, exercising the ethics of obligation in the context of the interpretive process that follows presented a very different set of challenges. Not only was it important to remain true to my research partners, it was important to remain true to the unfolding ethical and moral obligation as an educator to "be involved in a critical, post-modern deconstructive research" (Blades, 1997) in the hope of affecting change.

Chapter 4: Initial Interpretations of the Conversation

Action research, which uses conversation as a way of critiquing experience to reveal meaning and generate new meaning, involves several layers of interpretation. The research partners in the unfolding conversational exchange enact the initial interpretation of experience. This involves the spontaneous interpretation that comes in response to emergent stories and the more deliberate interpretations as the group reviews texts from previous sessions. These initial interpretations are often dynamic discursive exchanges devoid of any obvious logic yet rich in meaning and interpretive possibilities. The resulting conversational texts, which are often less vivid and lively than the actual conversation, provide the foundation for further interpretation by the researcher. This and the proceeding chapter demonstrates how the conversational text can also be interpreted at several levels.

Over several months, I engaged in a number of what I initially believed to be false starts. I was searching for the 'the' way to approach the text in an effort to uncover generative, new or previously unrecognised, possibilities. Ironically, the act of searching was forcing me to dance in the very flux (the confounding space of confusion) I sought to open to the group; I was floundering, coping, and playing in the sea of possibilities for interpretation.

What I eventually came to realize, through conversation with my advisor (David Blades, personal communication, April 23, 2001) and through a return to Caputo's texts (1987 and 2000), was that these various efforts at interpretation all

contributed to my understanding of the relationship between educational leadership and generative possibility; in essence, as Gadamer (1976) suggests, I had entered into a conversation with the conversational text.

Over the course of a year of living with the conversational text as my personal history unfolded so did my interpretations. Caputo (2000), drawing from Gadamer, describes this process:

> There is a certain 'noetic' finitude, a finitude which besets human understanding, which is unable to encompass or circumscribe its objects because of its own factical, historical limitations. But corresponding to this, let us say on the 'noematic' side, there lies a veritable infinity of both historical event and written text which likewise accounts for the impossibility of canonical interpretation. (pp. 46-47)

I discovered that there is no absolute finite way to interpret the text, as there is no finite, acceptable or 'canonical' interpretation to be found. Rather, each interpretative act must be considered for its contributions to an ever-unfolding understanding of our lived experience as educators and research partners and possibilities for educational leadership.

Initial Thematic Interpretations

I began by attempting to interpret the conversation using the themes identified during the reconnaissance conducted with principals when conceptualising the research (see Chapter 2, pp. 27-33). The original list of "control, finance and allocation of resources, and process and decision-making" (see Chapter 2, p. 26) were redefined to include two broader themes:

- education and the business model/metaphor, the affect on purpose, roles and values; and
- education as institution, 'the' school, individuals, relationships, and power.

Both of these themes contain elements of control, finances and resource allocation, and decision-making rooted in issues of power.

As one might expect, the limited set of themes appeared in almost every line in the text, like the newly purchased car that you suddenly notice others driving once your attention is fixated on the new acquisition. In hindsight, it seems obvious that this was to be expected, given that I entered the study with these 'Gadamerian prejudices.'

This type of initial interpretation of the conversation is inevitable and essential to hermeneutic interpretation and may generate greater understanding of our situation as educational leaders. But it does not necessarily provide insight into generative possibilities for "How else it can be?" In this early stage of interpretation, I had not found a way to remain open to possibility. It was a struggle not to become fixated or obsessed with finding text that supports this narrowly predefined themes in a ruthless hunt to support my preconceptions. For example, given what we know of the borrowing that educational administration has done from the business model, it should not be surprising that there are endless examples to reinforce the notion of the insidious use of business language in

education. Throughout this initial stage of interpretation I was haunted by an ever-growing discomfort that I had somehow missed the point.

My second attempt at interpretation stemmed from a feeling that I needed to be able to engage in a 'free reading' of the text in search of emergent themes. As I embarked on this second review of the text, I began to reread hermeneutic texts, in particular Caputo's (1987, 2000) radical hermeneutics, in the hope that I might deepen my understanding of the interpretive process.

My attempts at a free reading generated several emergent themes, but a closer look merely confirmed that the vast majority of what I was seeing was an expanded list that fit tidily into the two broader themes I had identified in my initial reading. I also discovered that there was a strong correlation between what I saw as emergent and the influence of my ongoing reading in radical hermeneutics. Again, although helpful in understanding our lived experiences, I sensed that I would not really be able to reach beyond the boundaries of my prejudices as long as I engaged with preconceived notions of what I should or might find.

I remained trapped within the walls of method focused on the 'what,' the themes within the group's conversation. Lost were the grand proclamations of the research proposal, the declarations of remaining "open to possibility as the study finds direction in the unfolding" (p. 50). The tidy linear nature of the analysis in both these initial approaches limited movement within the text; it limited play with the interwoven network of notions, ideas, and questions. Where was the opening

to creativity, possibility, and surprise; where was generative possibility, the space where the deeply pedagogical might live?

At this point I was only beginning to piece together the interpretive processes. I was slowly realising that what I saw as separate processes were in fact a single evolving process that was moving in the direction of a more radical hermeneutic interpretation; an interpretation that would provide insight rather than conclusions.

What follows in this chapter is a summary of my first two attempts at interpretation. These initial more technical interpretations contribute and eventually led to the more intuitive interpretation of the text found in Chapter 5.

The principals' have been given gender-neutral pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality. My contributions to the conversation are identified by my nickname, Ken. Both the principals and I are included in all references to "the research partners," "the research group," and "the group."

Education and the Business Metaphor

In the opening session, once the general process had been discussed, the conversation quickly focused on the perceived paradox of being an educator and administrator in the context of the business model. In response to the question, "What struck you as interesting in the research proposal?," Kelly reflected:

> You know what I was kind of struck by was that chart, learning verses education (Research Proposal, p. 16). When I started teaching I was probably a whole lot more down the 'citizenship alley' than I am right now as an administrator. We started [out] thinking in terms of the whole child.

> Now we are administrators, and we are talking about SBDM in a climate of forced capitalism. We are setting our schools up to be training grounds for employees of somebody, we're not so much concerned about the liberal arts and that sort of thing. It's a real conflict that we live with every day. It is so much in conflict with the 'probable mission' that we entered education with! We're constantly justifying these two concepts.

It appears that the struggle is not with or against the business metaphor, but how the metaphor conflicts with the "probable mission" that guided Kelly into education; the original desire to address the needs of the "whole child," emotional, physical, and spiritual. This reflection led to the following conversation:

> The 'widget' factor we're into is really a downer. (Sandy)
>
> And what makes it worse is that as administrators we are probably good at widgets. I mean you couldn't administer a school if you didn't have a sense of business. (Kelly)
>
> I think, some of us force ourselves into that model. It's not the natural tendency to work in that way. (Alex)
>
> I bet you, we crucify that at times just because we think differently. Do we think differently? (Ken)
>
> I think to a large degree we do because we are not focused on profit. I guess you could say we are focused on results, but the results are sometimes not measured as easily as profit lines are. (Alex)

There is early recognition that the 'business of education' is somehow different, an uneasiness with the juxtaposition of a business model on education, which lead to rooting out or testing of why this might be.

> I don't want to work in an environment that is that profit orientated to where people are just cogs. I think as school-based administrators we use the business model, but what we add is that… that human component. We're just more concerned about the person that's supposed to be doing the learning than we are about the results. (Terry)

Throughout the sessions we all engaged in this ongoing internal struggle with our purpose for entering and continuing in education, our role as

administrators expected to implement a business model, and the perceived conflicting values.

These early comments resurfaced quickly in the second session as we shared our reflections on school-based decision-making.

> I believe that we… that they… took a business model and tried to make it fit the education process [speaker's emphasis], and that does not work because of what was said earlier, we're not dealing with widgets and digits, we're dealing with a whole being. So I believe that where the process has fallen down is in that whole concept of dealing with the child. We can't put something there quantitatively that will say… oh we can do the testing and all that, that's what they've tried to bring in their tests for… but in reality, in the business model there's something quantifiable there at the end, you know, if you do more you got more. A good teacher, his satisfaction is inwards not outwards. Business is a totally different system, strictly competitive. (Sydney)

Sydney appears to be struggling with the difference between the 'business model' and the 'education process,' and is suggesting that the competitive nature of the business model narrows the focus to measurable quantities such as results and rewards. But what may get lost or remain unattended in the competition is the broader holistic set of needs of each child.

Shortly after, as the conversation continued, Terry countered with:

> I believe site-based management definitely can produce more positives than negatives. I think two heads are better than one. You can give it whatever name you want to, but if you get everybody in an organization believing in a set of principles, and then everybody working towards achieving those, then synergy happens and all of those other neat things. And I think you produce a better result whether it is widgets or whether it is kids. (Terry)

Terry sees something different in site-based management, another possibility, choosing to focus on the participative nature of the decision-making rather than the underlying competitive nature of the business model.

Right to the very end, in the closing conversation, we continued to struggle:

> We don't produce widgets like other businesses will. And this reinforces the idea that we do operate differently than other organizations or businesses or industries. It's not in the nature of what we do. (Terry)
>
> You know what, the specs for the widget change constantly… (Alex)
>
> …with you, and then it changes with [you], and with [you]... (Terry)
>
> …even society's specifications for the widgets. (Alex)
>
> When you build a car, you know the basic specifications: wheels, steering, air conditioner, etc. When you build a kid… (Ken)
>
> …it's not a widget factory where kids are processed. [We] have to respect that each one is different. (Terry)
>
> The factory model is why we have so many critics. (Alex)

These conversations show that we recognize the influence of the business metaphor on our view of education. But perhaps more importantly they lead to the question, where within our experiences and understandings lie the possibilities for educational leadership? In our recognition of the importance of addressing the needs of the whole child, in the difference between the business model and the education process, in our interpretation of SBDM, or in a complex combination of these and other factors?

Education as Institution

The phrase "education as institution" carries many possible meanings, inferences, and nuances. The notion of "institution" can conjure up visions of an

entrenched, sedentary, and suspicious view of education that is often physically symbolised by 'the' school. Ambiguously it also speaks to notions of tradition, consistency, and trust. The word institution, when defined as that which is established, presents a curious double entendre that paradoxically often carries both meanings for many. When reflecting upon and interpreting the conversation, one must always consider the 'other' meaning or possibility that could be drawn from the conversation; what may seem secure to one may represent incarceration to another or perhaps that which seems liberating can also be seen as unruly.

There were several conversations that would easily fit into the very broad theme of education as institution, some with and those without a direct reference to the word "institution." All of these references speak to the power and control institutions have over those that live within their walls. The selected passages that follow all speak to the notion of the ambiguous nature of our accepted practices. However, the key within each excerpt is not the identification of the affect of the institution. The key lies in the act of questioning and the subsequent wrestling with the issue or dilemma.

Regiment and art within the institution

This first passage is a look at the blur between the roles and responsibilities of parents and the school, the impact of the institution on students, and the teacher's role:

> But listen to what we are saying. Our children, these children that are in our education system now, don't know how to question … (Kelly)

...how to rebel. (Ken)

Teach them to rebel. Where is that in our curriculum? Where is that in SBDM? Teach them to rebel! (Kelly)

It's not in our curriculum, but I think that its part of our role as parents. (Alex)

Is it part of our role as parents? (Kelly)

It is I think it is primarily my role as a parent with my kids to have them question, and they do! They question religion, they question politics, they question all the things around them, and I think that's healthy. (Alex)

It's one of the things that makes our lives more difficult. (Sandy)

For sure! (Alex)

Maybe they do... (Ken)

...know how to rebel. (Terry)

I agree their life is so much different than ours. (Sandy)

I look at primary[19], and in primary I see children asking questions, you know, "why is it like that?" Children ask that question. I don't hear those questions being asked in upper elementary and junior high school... maybe some of those questions are being asked. (Kelly)

I'm not sure they are necessarily? (Ken)

What I see in upper elementary and junior high is a 'regiment of learning' taking place, and I see parents in school councils supporting that regiment of learning. In fact being afraid of moving away from that regiment of learning! And I see myself as an administrator, trapped in that regiment. I look at some of the professionals I work with, and if it isn't lockstep, sequential, linear, and written into a workbook so that it makes the day easier... (Kelly)

How did that happen? (Ken)

How <u>did</u> [speaker's emphasis] that happen? (Kelly)

That's a good question, how <u>did</u> [speaker's emphasis] that happen? (Sandy)

You know, 'cause... when did we become technicians as educators?

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[19] The term "primary" refers to Grades 1 to 3, "upper elementary" to Grades 4 to 6, and "junior high school" to Grades 7 to 9.

(Ken)

When did that approach to teaching become the norm? (Alex)

Why is it important for our students to be taught how to rebel? Is it our frustration with the constraints imposed on us by the institution that is reflected in this excerpt? Perhaps a response to these questions is found in the gentle condemnation for the "regiment of learning" described as "lockstep, sequential, linear, and written into a workbook" that echoes in the repetition of, "How did that happen?" There seems to be a sense or perhaps even a fear that unwittingly we may be training our students to be the next wave of unquestioning compliant technicians. Somehow our institution called 'school' suppresses the curiosity that ignites the joy of learning in our students. Yet ambiguously, in the midst of expressions of concern for our students' inability to question there is a single soft intrusion of the concern that they might know how to rebel, which may only complicate life (both their and ours). The group waivers back and forth, questioning and testing our assumptions and reflecting on "How <u>did</u> [speaker's emphasis] this happen?"

As the conversation continues we reached back into our experience in search of possible answers.

Was it like that for us when we were kids? (Ken)

I think it was. In spite of all the teacher education programs in the world people tend to teach like we were taught. (Alex)

I don't think there has been anything new in education in a hundred years. (Terry)

They say that if Rip Van Winkle woke up today, he would not be able to do his own laundry, but he would recognize a classroom just like

that! (Kelly) [laughter]

How do we move back to the art of teaching [speaker's emphasis]? Or, do we need to move back? Or does the art still exist in the classroom today? (Ken)

Oh, I think it does, I think the art is there for some. And I mentioned primary, because people that go into primary teaching have to teach children, because it doesn't work teaching curriculum. Consider Social Studies in Grade 9 where you're talking about economies and all that kind of stuff. And where does actually being able to read, for example, fit in that. I think it becomes very complex and very muddy for teachers to try and sort out what is it that [they are] teaching. So can we see the artistry? Do we know who the artists are? (Kelly)

I think that there are still some. (Alex)

Yah, I do too. (Ken)

Yah, for sure. (Sandy)

It's the same as the person that was able to accommodate all of the different students in their class, and their different learning styles, and their different levels of knowledge and understanding, and they were doing it seventy five years ago, and they had no idea… (Terry)

They made [their students] all feel like worthwhile people. (Alex)

Yah, they had no idea they were doing anything special! (Terry)

After an initial agreement that things are not that different within our recollected past, there appears to be an attempt to contrast the notion of a "regiment of learning" with the notion of the "art of teaching." Kelly again raises the difference in teaching at the primary level in order to link the art of teaching to a focus on the 'who' (the students), rather than the 'what' (the curriculum). The group agrees and further defines the 'art' as being able to respond to the different needs of our students. But the crucial point is that this ability to recognize and respond is somehow 'special'; teaching as art goes beyond technique and stems from the intuitive ability of teachers to sense their students' needs.

Underlying this positive affirmation of teachers as artists, there seems to be a sadness as we note that the art of teaching is still there for only "some" teachers. These early exchanges with their references to art and the need to escape a regiment of learning may be alluding to where the possibilities for educational leadership may lead.

Expectations of/with the institution

Throughout the text there is a constant pushing and pulling, a highlighting of the paradoxes and ambiguity of our institutions. In the following passage the groups struggles with the network of needs the system must respond to: the societal [expressed as "the country"] need to develop in students a set of values, the system's need to generate standards, and individual student needs.

> One of the major reasons for public education was for the benefit of the country. We're into the new century and we're actually talking about education being fitted or formed for the needs of the individual. And here [pointing to research proposal] it's talking about that concept, the "coatrack"[20] not only has all of knowledge, but all of me, who I am. And what they are saying is, so lets take this away and look at the possibilities that exist. Well, we're working with a system that was created with a mindset that everybody has to have a set of values that we all have to buy into if this system called education, or country, is going to work. So we're trying to deal with a system that was built on the opposite of what this is saying. (Terry)
>
> You know, most of the structures that have been put in place for the past decade have been minimum standards. You must attain a high school diploma to do that, you must... and now, we're seeing open-endedness in terms of pushing kids to achieve as many credits as they can. You're

[20] This is a reference to Heidegger's (1950/1977) use of the metaphor of the "coatrack," Ge-stell, as that upon which we hang not only our ideas but our very being (see Chapter 1, pp. 12-13).

looking at the potential down the road, as opposed to getting the minimum to do this, this, this, and this… follow this lock step. (Sandy)

Where as, when I went, there was absolutely no doubt that… you know… the first two months of high school over with and "you're in university guy," and you better know what you're going to do. We were in the 'get it done' mode. No [fooling] around in arts or something, you're going into something that you'll have a job when you get out. (Alex)

I grew up that way, the 'get it done' [mode]. (Terry)

We all did! (Sandy and Alex)

Terry is trying to make sense of the notion of the 'coatrack' as that upon which we hang our very being (Blades, 1995), wrestling with what this might mean. The important point is not whether or not the interpretation is correct, but that the act of interpretation is carrying the group into unknown, uncharted places. In apparent contradiction to earlier statements describing a nostalgic look at the past where questioning was encouraged, the group was equally agreeable to a painting of the past that describes a "no [fooling] around in arts" and "get it done" attitude. Paradoxically the terms "open-endedness" and "pushing kids to achieve" are used in the same phrase. There are no tidy understandings or sequential linear explanations that clearly set-out the expectations of and within the institution, just ambiguous tides and swirls of reflection on experience and often unresolved contradictions moving through the conversation.

Power of/within institutions

Throughout the conversation there is an intuitive questioning of the power that moves within the relationships that constitute the institution. The excerpt that follows is perhaps our most obvious attempt to sort out these power relationships.

It comes just after a short exchange where Kelly and Terry share the difference in perceptions regarding their leadership styles; Terry is perceived as "belonging to the staff" and Kelly "belonging to the students."

> So, we live a powerful existence. We live in a very interesting… (Ken)
>
> …but we don't know that! (Terry)
>
> No, we don't recognize the impact we have on other people. You need to reflect back on what it was like when you were a classroom teacher, and [how you saw] the people that were administrators. I remember being terrified of [the vice-principal]. (Sandy)
>
> Really? (Kelly)
>
> That office as vice-principal was a very powerful office at that time. I didn't think it was when I was there, it wasn't a powerful office. It was just… (Sandy)
>
> I think that you loose sight of [the fact], that in the eyes of some people you're a tremendously powerful person because you have that title. And we don't see that because we are the same people. You're still the same person you were when you were teaching, you're the same person that you were when you got hired. Oh, I was wonderfully proud of myself [when I became a Principal], and then I realised, I don't remember the Superintendent giving me all of this authority. Like in all the talks, where did he say that you have the power to do… what? What can I actually… my word… then it dawned on me, I don't have any <u>real</u> [speaker's emphasis] power! The Superintendent has the power, so if something happens and there's a disagreement, then the Superintendent will decide. If he agrees with me, then I had the power. If he doesn't, then I didn't! (Terry)
>
> The trick is people under you think you have power. I mean, I'm sure… well at least I think… the Superintendent would say that he's not the person with the power, it is the Trustees with the power. And the Trustees would say, well it's the voters that have the power, and it goes on and on. (Kelly)

In this exchange, we are wrestling with the notion that power follows position. There appears to be the realization that the perception of power is also related to where one is situated and inevitably power appears to emanate from

elsewhere other than your position within the institution. The conversation continues as the group tried to identify the source of power within schools:

> You know who I say has the power, the teacher in the classroom. And I think they have power from a perspective that they respond directly to the children. (Ken)

The notion of power begins to shift from a focus on position to that of relationships. The teacher's power resides within the relationship with the students. This spurs on the comment:

> Principals have power... and here is where I was going to go... if they give their power out. The more power you give out, the more power you get. And I think that's crucial in site-based management. (Sandy)

Power shifts from a force that resides with an individual to one that pervades the network of relationships within the institution, supporting the notion that possibilities for educational leadership lie not with an individual but in the network of relationships allowed for by the institution.

The institution begins to take on a life of its own, an organic quality where the network of relationships become like a circulatory system that breathes life into the institution and constitutes its spirit. This conversation is reminiscent of Foucault's analysis of power. In a 1978 interview Foucault asked,

> Who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? Who is forcing me to live in a particular place when I work in another? How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken? (1988, p. 103)

In response to his own questions, Foucault moves away from the 'who' and refocuses on the 'how':

> I don't believe that this question of "who exercises power?" can be resolved unless that other question "how does it happen?" is resolved at the same time. If we reach the point of designating exactly all those people, all those "decision makers," we will still not really know why and how the decision was made, how it came to be accepted by everybody, and how it is that it hurts a particular category of person, etc." (pp. 103-104)

By doing this he defines power within institutions as "the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was" (p. 104). Almost as if taking our queue from Foucault, the group eventually turns to a discussion of the 'building' as a representation of the institution:

> How could we get the idea that the important thing is <u>not</u> [speaker's emphasis] the student, that it's not the staff, it's the building? And I'm presenting it this way. Students are there for so many years, and they have a purpose for being there; they've got a job to do, and they're in and they're out. The staff will stay there, some will stay there for twenty years, some will stay for ten, some will stay for one or two, and they're gone. So there is no constant. The only thing that is constant is that the building will be there long after the students that are in there right now are gone. (Terry)
>
> Do you mean the building, like the institution? (Kelly)
>
> The institution and what it stands for. (Terry)
>
> OK, not the physical plant, the… (Ken)
>
> …well yes, it engages the physical plant… (Terry)
>
> …as the symbol of the institution. (Ken)
>
> The entity that in a Canadian court of law today has every right that every human does in this country. They can do the same thing, they can sue, they can be sued, they can… they have all the rights of people. That institution that it stands for, isn't that important? This is what, when your children come to our school, we will help them learn. It is our reputation or what we stand for. Maybe that is important! (Terry)
>
> Yah, exactly! That's a big part of it, that's that whole… (Sandy)
>
> Maybe it's the most important part! (Terry)
>
> It could be! That's the difficulty that we have when we move into a

> new chair, because you're messing with what we stand for, what that institution stands for. (Sandy)
>
> You see for me the institution is the children, not the building. The building is a place that's all it is. (Kelly)
>
> I can agree. Each setting has its own character and nature, and there is a fit that has to happen at some point between setting and leader. And it is about the kids, but each building has an identity. And the identity is in fact what the community expects… and I am not always sure what that term means, because there are all kinds of communities… it is the perception they want to have. Right or wrong, real or not, it is the perception they want to have of that building. And when you play with the perception, you're playing with the perception of what [the school jurisdiction] has been forever. (Ken)

The power of the institution goes beyond the individual positions or functions of its members. The power of/within the institution stems from its history, the perceived experience of the institution that constitutes its identity within the community. Consequently, change enacted by the individual may be perceived as an act of violence against the established values of the institution. The power of the institution arises from the acts committed by the institution to defend itself from the intrusive acts of others that are unable and/or unwilling to conform to the established values.

This conversation goes to the root of the question of "why is it like that"; how is it that our institutions exercise power? Although at this point the conversation never quite gets to the response, once again, it is the questioning and subsequent reflection that is significant; professional conversation was inviting us to question and challenge our own and one another's previously unchallenged interpretations and understandings of the school as an institution.

The group persists in an attempt to further our understanding of how power is exercised within schools as institutions through our shared experience of the school jurisdiction:

> But what is [our school jurisdiction] (Kelly)?
>
> What the community requires or maybe just wants. But the community has a corporate memory. I hate to use a business term, but anyway… The community has a memory, and that memory is selective. The written history of [the school jurisdiction] for the last five years in policy doesn't mention all our warts, bumps and bruises. It doesn't mention those. (Ken)
>
> Now we're cycling back to that one person's interpretation again! (Sandy)
>
> Exactly! Isn't that exactly it? (Ken)
>
> But for a purpose. (Terry)
>
> So we can have a positive corporate memory. And in fact, ten years from now, there will be two memories, the memory in policy and then there will be the real memory. And the real memory for those of us who manage to still be around by that point will be the deficit, the difficulty with SBDM, the loosing of a staff… all of those things will be there. (Ken)
>
> The memory will be what each individual… it will be fragmented in so many directions that it would be impossible to trace. Because the memory will be of each child's experience, it will be yours, even yours will be blended with what your hopes and dreams of what the future are, and who you are today, and who you are tomorrow… (Kelly)
>
> …and how you see the world today… (Ken)
>
> …and what you brought with you when you came. It's really profound, the 'aha.' (Kelly)

The significance of this excerpt lies in the recognition of the complex configuration of experiences and memories that make-up the institution's identity constituted of selective memory and rooted in individual purpose. The group reaches no conclusion, no answer to the question "Why is it like that?," but it

seems that we were beginning to recognize the complexity of the questions before us.

At this point, Terry makes an attempt at reconciling the differences in perspectives.

> I'm going to take one more crack at it. I'm going to go back to this concept of the building. You say it's the students, and I think I'm saying the same thing, and I think I can accomplish the same thing. The only thing that is missing, going back to what we were talking about earlier, is the shift in Canadian society in the last ten, fifteen years. We have become very "me, me, me" orientated. And it is viewed as "me, me, me" orientated. And there are values and norms that everyone has to accept and agree to, that's what makes a country. I think schools still have responsibility, and in some cases, we almost might be combating what students are learning at home. Because I think Canadian society has moved to where the rights of the individual outweigh the rights for the group. And I disagree with that, and I think the majority of Canadians disagree with that... (Terry)
>
> ...it's called neo-liberalism... (Sandy)
>
> ...and I think it is the courts that have done that, not the people. So to me schools are extremely important, because you still need to have these institutions that are teaching the norms and values that Canadians believe in. And the reason that I say that is 'cause I think that we are much more powerful as a group than we are as individuals. <u>As long as the institution is doing its job</u> [speaker's emphasis], individuals will have the opportunity within that institution to go off on their own tangent. They always have been able to, and they still can. But if you take away the importance of the institution and you make it all the individuals, then you don't have any structure. I can't, the institution can't, put those norms and values into those young people if the individual student is allowed to be the center. (Terry)

Terry seems to be suggesting that the institution and the needs of the institution take precedence over the needs of the individual child; it has a "job" to do, to do <u>to</u> [italics added] children. The suggestion seems to be that the smaller institution of the school must help the larger institution of society do its job. Our

responsibility is to create, or perhaps manufacture, the citizens needed to drive the larger institution.

Kelly responds in an attempt to equate the institution with the people it is made up of, with the community that composes the 'corporate memory':

> I think you mistake me when I talk about children as though I'm talking about the individual child. And of course the individual child needs to be attended to, but when I talk about institution, I'm not talking the individual child. There's a cycle that happens, because those children that go out are the ones that come back, they're the ones that... Lord knows I'm old enough that I'm hiring students that I taught [chuckles]. So when I say they are the institution, I'm talking about the cyclical nature of that group of people that are currently children in the school, where the building itself is just a hollow place. (Kelly)
>
> Is that community? (Ken)
>
> Maybe community, I don't know if I am necessarily talking about a "community school."[21] (Kelly)
>
> What about [the high school] that has twenty-five hundred students, and they have their crest on the floor of their main entrance? Twenty-five hundred students go in and out of that building, how many times in a day, and students do not walk across the crest! Day in and day out... (Terry)
>
> You're talking about tradition. (Kelly)
>
> That's the building, that's a tradition, that's the institution, that's the facility, that's the memories, that's the tradition... that's important, that's passing on something! (Terry)
>
> ...tradition, culture, symbols... (Ken)
>
> ...that makes up that facility, that institution... and that's what's being transmitted to the students that attend that school. That's just as important as the war of 1812 you know. (Terry)
>
> It used to be a tradition for Hindu women to throw themselves on their husband's funeral fires, because once they were married they were viewed as having only one soul... (Kelly)

---

[21] The phrase "community school" is a reference to a government-funded initiative in the early 1990's that provided schools with additional supports if they had specific identifiable links to their community.

Do you believe that people throwing their lives away compared to that fact you wouldn't walk across your school crest... (Terry)

I'm just saying that traditions have a way of... (Kelly)

You could do a whole thesis on just the last five minutes of conversation here! (Sandy)

I will tell you that the last half-hour has been incredible! The power of all these notions is that none of them are wrong! (Ken)

I agree! (Kelly and Terry)

There seems to be a great deal of ambivalence within the conversation. The sudden shifts in thought, the attempts at rephrasing, the bold swings in direction, the addition of humour, the use of examples, and perhaps most telling is the abrupt closing down of the conversation, all allude to our internal struggle as we tried to make sense of our experiences.

The group seems to sense that within the walls of the school there is a dynamic, a power, some sort of energy that guides action and somehow defines the institution. Once again, the notion of community floats briefly through the conversation. It was this thread of "community" woven into the text that would return during the third attempt at interpretation reflected in the more radical interpretation of the conversation found in the proceeding chapter.

However, to this point community had been attributed with the ability to set expectations, establish desired perceptions, and select corporate memory for the institution. In short, community seemed to have a key role in defining the nature of the institution, yet somehow itself eluded definition. My simple passing admission of only moments before that "I am not always sure what that term [community] means" seems to beg the question inspired by Foucault (1988). How

is it that our institutions have become accepted by everybody, and how it is that that they are allowed to hurt particular categories of persons?

The group conversation suggests that we recognize the importance of questioning our institutions and our accepted practices if we are to be opened to possibility:

> We have here (referring to the Session 1 text), "We still have trouble breaking away from thirty little bodies traveling to the classroom with thirty little desks stuck in rows and we stand-up in front… that whole model of education" (Session 1). Why do we have trouble breaking away from that, what's the problem? (Ken)
>
> Because the buildings are built for thirty kids in a box. (Sandy)
>
> Partly, but I think it is comfort zone; it's what we know. (Kelly)

We continue to search for answers to the question of "Why is it like that?," falling into the easy answers of attributing acceptance of practice to the shape of buildings and remaining within peoples "comfort zones." Yet as we struggle onward there is a sense that these answers are shallow and do not lead to true understanding:

> There's an expectation I think from parents, because that's what they had and [they] have been successful. (Sydney)
>
> I think that there is a tremendous amount of resistance to trying to change the system, because it's the kind of business where everyone's an expert, because everyone has been through the education system. Just try and go ahead and do something innovative, and pull enough of your parent body along with you to go about making that change. So the structure is frozen in time. An example is going without grade level, non-graded school. You know, doing it differently, grouping the children in terms of their learning capacity and doing project work. There are those that have done a fine job of that, but I think it's been expensive for them as professionals. Not an easy road to go, a very tough mountain to climb, because parents don't recognize it as education. (Kelly)

The conversation returns to the issue of risk associated with principals not meeting parent-community expectations. But where in lies the risk: in the in-ability to "pull" parents along and convince them that the change would be beneficial to their children; or perhaps the risk is in the feeling itself that parents need to be pulled along? The perception that parents need pulling along limits possibilities to the ability to manipulate the community into agreement, rather than allowing expectations to move through shared leadership based on a trusting community-school relationship. Community thus can be sometimes seen as an obstacle in the road to be moved, rather than an equal partner in the journey.

Why is it that parents are seen as requiring "pulling"? Could it be that the group concern goes deeper than the resistance that often accompanies imposed change to a reflection of the our own bias and/or limitation? Terry takes the conversation to a deeper level by raising a crucial point for the group to consider:

> Does society really want people that are different? Is there a real desire? Is there a real acceptance on the part of society for people that are different? Or do they want us all within a range to act, behave, to sound, to dress, like everyone else? If not, why wouldn't we [speaker's emphasis] take thirty kids and put them in a class and have the teachers teach them all the same thing? (Terry)

Prior to this point conversation had centred almost exclusively on identifying the external forces that exercise control over and within schools as institutions. The group had focused on identifying the pressures that are often beyond our control, such as the generalised expectations of community. The shift to the personal "we" moves the exchange to the level of professional conversation

where group members are testing, questioning, and playing with our accepted understandings and practices. In so doing, we began to identify expectations for ourselves, each other, and our colleagues:

> You made a comment last time (Alex, Session 1) that ties into that being different. You talked about some of our administrators who are different [that] find themselves in trouble pretty quickly, or are not as accepted by their peers as easily… you know that type of reaction to them. There is a lot of ambiguity around that type of person. (Ken)
>
> Also in there, I said that every one of us is different. And I guess maybe I am getting older, but I am starting to appreciate all of those styles can be effective. And I think sometimes when we actually see where people are coming from, at least we gain respect for them. (Alex)
>
> As long as the parameters are known, as long as there are no surprises… you know, [if a person] flares out only occasionally, that's when it's scary. As long as everybody knows that this is the way this person is, he's got this reaction to this kind of thing, people are comfortable with that, they can adapt. So it's the comfort level of the group that you have to work with, making sure that you don't change the rules in a big way overnight. (Sandy)
>
> You know, I think that we have raised one of the central issues in your question for us. And it's about whether we seek sameness or diversity, and whether we celebrate diversity or are tied into sameness. One of the readings that I did, the key word that came to me was Utopia, which is oneness. And that seems to be what we are always looking for is the Utopia, that perfect place where there isn't struggle, everything is the same. And what [the author] suggests is that what we should be looking for is a 'politopia,' where in fact all the differences we're about are celebrated. That may sound very 'pie in the sky,' but let's have a really close look at what's happening in our economy and globalization. We're going to be rubbing economic shoulders with people from different countries, different cultures, with different expectations… even about how important life is or isn't! I think we are in a very rarefied atmosphere in the communities that we live in, where everything has been the same. I'm not so sure people do want diversity! (Kelly)
>
> I'm not so sure they do either. (Terry)
>
> Well I think people want diversity, but whenever there is a problem, people go back to things that offer a comfort zone. And so the comfort zone is something that you know in the past and other people will accept.

> [When] people take a chance, [they] have to look after your own self-esteem in that process and most of us are not that brave. (Sydney)

There is a desire within the group to be perceived as accepting [italics added] of difference; we are willing [italics added] to live with each other's differences. But this is tempered by the need for consistency in behaviour where others must "make sure" that they are careful to remain within our tolerance levels. Does this suggest that we are willing to tolerate others as long as they do not push on our borders?

But does the contribution of Kelly begin to answer the earlier question, "why indeed should we seek opening to generative possibility?" What is being suggested is that we will have to make the conscious decision to change what we value if we are to open ourselves to generative possibility. Tolerance will not be enough, we will have to make an extra-ordinary shift and open ourselves and our institutions to a "celebration" of difference and understanding of other ways of being. Here the reference to globalization appears to be more than recognition of a new global reality. It seems to recognize the complexity of our existence and a need to prepare for an uncertain, unpredictable future. Our children's future lies beyond the "very rarefied atmosphere [of their local] communities that [they] live in, where everything [is] the same" (Kelly) in a world filled with diversity.

Yet the group conversation implies that generally our institutions are not open to difference, and often actively resist diversity. Which if true suggests that possibilities for educational leadership exist in dangerous uncharted places and

that opening the borders of our institutions and venturing out into uncertainty will require courage.

As I worked through my initial interpretations, I sensed that we were still looking for the "magic formula" that would solve all problems, the model-of-models. I was becoming concerned that generative possibility would elude the group to the end. Ambiguously, I also saw a great deal of hope within the conversation; as a group we were seriously examining our values, questioning our institutions, and testing our motives as leaders.

It was at this point that I turned to the hermeneutic texts with a greater sense of urgency in the hope that I might find alternative ways of interpreting the texts we had created.

Chapter 5: Opening Interpretation to Possibility

As I was working through the initial interpretations of the previous chapter I had been revisiting a number of references, with particular time focused on Caputo's initial text (1987) and his most recent text, More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are (2000). Gradually, from within the turbulence of concern and confusion, I began to see an opening in the possibilities for interpretation that might lead to generative possibility.

However, it was in my rereading of Jardine (1992) that I was reminded of my earlier concerns regarding method. By imposing too much structure to the conversation, I might be limiting our opportunities to discover generative possibilities for educational leadership:

> Methodical, technically based approaches to inquiry in education offer themselves as essentially informative. They are designed to pass on information that is already understood, given a certain method or research design and a specific history of inquiry. In such approaches, understanding begins and ends with method and operates in service to such method. Understanding is thus educationally neutered: It is not designed to educe the possibility of understanding, but assumes such a possibility of its grounds. This is why Heidegger (1927/1972) maintained that we have come upon an age where the matters of inquiry have become matters of method.... [Data] is not the matters themselves, but rather the method [italics added] whereby what is given is rendered objectively presentable. (p. 117)

From this passage I realised that by restricting my review of the Superintendent-Principal conversation to a methodical thematic search I was limiting the possibilities for interpretation. This is not to negate the insights gained through my initial more technical interpretations of the previous chapter.

However, in consideration of Jardine's notion that technical inquiry controlled by method essentially informs, I realised that the insights provided by the thematic review responded more to the questions "What is it?" and "Why is it like that?" than to the question of "How else can it be?" I sensed that to this point I had not yet explored all of the possibilities offered by my own description of professional conversation.

Although my earlier interpretations had begun to open the conversational text to questioning and testing, I had not yet explored the opportunities for play that I hoped would reveal the possibilities that dance in the shadows beyond the portal to experience offered by the group's conversation.

The use of the term "portal" to describe the view into the lived experience of educational leaders is deliberate, because it is important to remember that the view is limited, and in some cases obstructed, by that which each of us choose to share. But non-the-less, this limited view provides opportunities for insight into our leadership experiences.

What I began to seek was an understanding of how I might adjust my view so that which dances in the shadows would not be lost in the blinding lights of technical methodology. It was here that I began to retrace the path that had lead to my original attempt to grasp radical hermeneutics.

Radical Hermeneutics and Critical Deconstruction

Deconstruction is an attempt to uncover or expose, the *Ge-stell* that enframes our understandings and limits possibility, an attempt to reveal our "complacency with the prevailing public interpretation of things" (Caputo, 1987, p. 63). As articulated earlier, both understanding and generative possibility are encumbered by the predelineation of experience. It is in an attempt to severe, truncate, terminate this predelineation that Caputo takes up Heidegger's argument that "deconstruction is hermeneutic violence [that] not only resists the prevailing understanding but also runs counter to it" (pp. 63-64). This critical deconstruction is not gratuitous violence for the purpose of destruction, but violence enacted in an attempt to recover an understanding of Being that is free of traditional metaphysical concepts:

> Its function then is positive, to break through the encrusted in order to recover the living experience, which has grown old and stiff. There is no hermeneutic recovery without deconstruction and no deconstruction not aimed at recovery. (Caputo, 1987)

Attempting to free oneself of traditional metaphysical concepts is no easy task, some might even say the challenge is impossible. But as with *Ge-stell*, the questioning alone can make a significant difference in the way one sees and understands the notion of Being. Questioning of previously unchallenged notions provides opportunities to reach beyond our acceptance in an effort to uncover the motives and social currents that drive our complacency. The resulting reflection can provide reasons and in some cases means to think and act in new ways; if

allowed, it can even open pathways to previously unconsidered generative possibilities.

In Radical Hermeneutics (1987), Caputo develops a rationale for the conception of a hermeneutic that is "born of the foundering of metaphysics" (p. 119). He proposes a radical hermeneutic that uses deconstruction as a means to expose and engage the flux in an attempt to "release the sciences" (p. 147) from the rule of technical method by keeping them "slightly off balance" (p. 147).

> Having exposed the life of reason at large to a certain 'groundlessness,' radical hermeneutics throws it on to its own so that it is not the puppet of some method but is forced to make its own way without metaphysical, methodological assurances. (p. 259)

Caputo (1987, 2000) proposes a hermeneutic that is exposed to Derrida's[22] critique of Heidegger, one that "does not pass through a moment of deconstruction in order to get to the other side of the flow"(1987, p. 147), emerging with nothing more that a cleverly disguised meta-narrative masquerading as a basic truth. Radical hermeneutics is an attempt to use critical deconstruction to "shatter meaning" so that we are thrown into the flux and forced to cope without the "guard-rails of metaphysics" (Caputo, 1987, p. 239). In essence, the flux becomes the counterpoint [the melody played against or in contrast to the basic or dominant

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[22] Derrida believed that Heidegger's use of hermeneutics to deconstruct meaning in search of a 'deeper truth,' stability, was evidence that he had succumbed to the very metaphysical enframing that he hoped to escape. For this reason Derrida believed that Heidegger's hermeneutic itself had to go through deconstruction.

melody] to the exercise of power. This is the place where the "constellations of power which grind us under" (p. 259) are thrown into turmoil and exposed for what they are.

But what hope does this deconstruction offer, where is the recovery? Caputo (1987) offers in response an "ethics of dissemination" (p. 260), which confronts:

> the binary oppositional schemes of Western metaphysics: higher and lower, ruler and ruled, cause and effect, science and opinion, master and slave, same and different, male and female, rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged.... The ethics of dissemination begins by systematically reversing these oppositional schemes, reversing the discrimination strategically, in order finally to displace oppositional arrangements in favor of the open and nonexclusionary. (p. 260)

Generative possibility can emerge in the ambiguous in-between spaces within the flux, because here it is not denied, repressed, or excluded by the debilitating binary oppositional schemes (Ted Aoki, personal communication, July 1998).

The task of radical hermeneutics then is to open conversation to competing viewpoints, making every attempt to ensure that no one is excluded, that the powerful do not monopolize the debate so as to manipulate, restrain or suppress the views of others. But this is easier said than done, for the ethics of dissemination operates from a position of distrust for everything that flourishes in the overgrowth of metaphysics. It presumes the natural tendency of the metaphysical to repress, normalize, and level everything, to "cling tenaciously to

life and presence long after they have spent their capital and done their work" (Caputo, 1987, p. 263).

But one must note that this is not an opposition to institutional organizations, for one must recognize that they are "usually the way to get things done…we tend by a natural momentum to organize our practices along systematic lines" (Caputo, 1987, p. 263). Rather, this healthy suspicion reminds us that we must continuously remember to keep these institutions "repeating forward" (p. 263) so that they remain flexible, transformative, and open to the flux. It is within this notion of repeating forward that professional conversation might gain momentum. Carson (1992) uses a similar notion in an examination of interpretive practice as discourse with others that leads to the exploration of possibilities, remembering [interpreting practice] forward [opening possibilities].

With a developing understanding of deconstruction and with renewed hope I then turned to a re-reading of the conversational text.

In Search of the 'Other'

The research centres on a desire to open educational leadership to unconsidered possibilities. If generative possibility lies in the ambiguous in-between spaces within the flux, the spaces beyond the walls or borders created by the meta-metaphor, outside the sphere of acceptable interpretation, then generative possibility may lie in an encounter with the unknown 'other.' This seems to

suggest that the possibilities for educational leadership lie in the possibility of encounters with the other.

As a group, we committed ourselves to the risk of professional conversation; the opening of ourselves and our experiences to questioning and testing in an attempt to uncover/discover possibility. In recognition of the limitations of the business metaphor, we agreed to an attempt at breaking through the borders of the dominant business metaphor. Although no one may have realised it at the time, in a sense we were committing to a willingness to expose ourselves to the unknown other. This is where the inherent risk lives, the potential for disruption (see Chapter 3, p. 67) that was articulated in the individual conversations with each principal prior to engaging in the research.

Deconstruction can be seen in this research then as an attempt to unravel the mysteries, the unseen constraints, which limit possibility and close out the other. As noted earlier, the language throughout the sessions confirmed the dominance of the business metaphor and the ambiguity of the concerns expressed by principals during the reconnaissance (see Chapter 2, pp. 27-33). But beyond the words and well-meaning veil of intent, there is the power of the dominant metaphor or meta-metaphor, which hides even from the speaker; the *Ge-stell* that we wear like a layer of skin, integral to our being. The purpose of deconstruction then is to attempt to peel away the skin, expose the flesh, and unmask the hidden biology. This is a violent act that is necessary if escape from/exposure of [even if momentarily] the *Ge-stell* is to be possible.

Is there evidence of an encounter, or even an acknowledgement of the other? Is there a recognition/awareness of the possibility of other ways of seeing or being?

What follows is a deconstruction of the text in an attempt to answer these questions.

Searching for evidence of openings to the flux

Within the flow of the research sessions there seemed to be a point where an opening in the borders of the meta-metaphor seemed possible. Early in the second session, Sydney recognized that the use of the word "manipulation" did not fully or correctly express leadership intent when working with others. This revelation stemmed from a conversation on the relationship between leadership and power, which lead to the question:

> So, power doesn't necessarily breed leadership, but leadership tends to breed power? (Ken)

Amongst the sounds and declarations of agreement came the statement, "Either that or leadership manipulates power" (Kelly).

What followed was a discussion of the word "manipulation" and the negative connotation attached to it. All agreed that we manipulate, but that somehow manipulating power was different from manipulating people; no one wanted to admit that they directly manipulated people. This lead to the statement:

> Well, you may be using the wrong word! …I haven't picked out the right word for manipulate, I think it's the wrong word, but I haven't picked out the right one in my mind yet… but you strongly influence [speaker's emphasis], something of that nature, you have to build your case. Is that

called manipulation by setting-up? (Sydney)

This lead to the response, "Some call that manipulation" (Alex)!

The discomfort with the realization and admission that everyone in the group manipulates followed by the subsequent desire to find another way of expressing our leadership, seemed to be a signal that we were beginning to recognize the *Ge-stell* and some of the problems with our existing leadership metaphors.

Our immediate search did not render any alternatives; we appeared unable to reach beyond the use of the obvious term "manipulation." The conversation slowly wandered in different directions and onward. But there seemed to be a new individual and personal assessment that had begun. The conversation moved to questions on community and how what we were doing individually and collectively affected our students.

Later in the same session, in the midst of a story saturated in metaphor that was being told by one of the members the word "orchestrate" was offered up as a way of describing leadership and the way we work with others. Almost unnoticed, the word slipped by, but in the moment of silent reflection that followed the story telling one of the members noted:

> But I think your thing about orchestration… we were calling it manipulation, but that's what it really is, orchestration. (Alex)

There was an initial delight with the revelation, but the questioning quickly resurfaced, erupting in conversation. Almost immediately, there was recognition

of the dual qualities of orchestration, of the dark and the light sides of this metaphor.

As someone that had been playing with the notion of alternative metaphors for some time, this opportunity offered a natural opening in the borders to invite my research partners to join me:

> Well there is positive orchestration, and there is orchestration to move people into the right place to do the right things. But there's orchestration when you're trying to serve your own purposes, and not… You know, like SBM has to be for the frontline… (Sandy)
>
> …the greater good… (Alex)
>
> …that's right. (Sandy)
>
> For the frontline? What do you mean by the "frontline"? (Terry)
>
> Serving the needs of students. (Sandy)
>
> Because, if you take the metaphor of music and orchestration, a truly good bandleader gets the best out of his players. Yet there are people that are conductors, who want the focus to be on them. You know, [the symphony conductor who is] very focused on "I want to be upfront and center and visible," and does not always get the best out of the orchestra as a result. (Ken)
>
> He doesn't have the respect of his musicians. (Sandy)
>
> That's right. So when you look at those types of relationships… we are conductors, aren't we… and there is an orchestra. So orchestration is a matter of style and it varies depending on the individual. But what if we looked at orchestration, and rather than thinking in terms of a business metaphor, we thought in terms of a music metaphor? You know, our role is that of a bandleader orchestrating the music of the school? (Ken)
>
> Yah, I like that! (Sandy)
>
> Think of the example we just used of the classical orchestra leader, controlling the music and not respecting his musicians. (Ken)
>
> That sounds familiar, not what I'd want as an alternative metaphor. (Kelly)
>
> But what if we used another music metaphor, like jazz? Where each musician has an opportunity to lead…can take the lead… the network of

relationships thing. (Ken)

But don't forget, jazz has rules too. Improvising isn't just doing anything, in most cases it's playing with a theme, even when you're playing with the theme, the theme still controls the music. (Sandy)

Exactly, in jazz once the theme is chosen and the music begins there's kind of an unfolding. The bandleader gets things started, orchestrates, but then the musicians move in and begin to improvise. The lead moves from one member of the band to the other. They play with the possibilities within the theme! (Ken)

So there's still control, still manipulation. (Terry)

So what's the difference? It's the playing [speaker's emphasis] with the music. (Ken)

There are always surprises! Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. (Sandy)

Exactly, the bandleader doesn't know what's going to happen… that's the surprise… that's [speaker's emphasis] the difference. You loose… no you give-up control… there's the difference, orchestration instead of manipulation. (Ken)

Sounds good, but I'm not sure the difference is that easy. (Terry)

Maybe it isn't that easy, maybe you don't do one or the other… you know… you kind of do both. There are rules, but no rules… control, but no control… sounds a bit scary, but it also sounds like school! (Kelly)

Yah, no kidding! (Sandy)

OK so we orchestrate, how does that change anything? (Terry)

It doesn't really. It doesn't change us, but maybe it changes the way we see ourselves and each other. (Alex)

So changing the metaphor changes our view, but it doesn't change us… but can it, can it change us… or at least the way we do things? (Ken)

For sure! We are who we are, but we can always learn something new. (Alex)

I don't think that it is a question of learning something new. It's more of… isn't it the type of thing where you look at what you are doing differently? You know what I mean? (Kelly)

This key conversation vividly reflects what the action research hoped to achieve. From the 'aha' that emerges from quite reflection, "we were calling it

manipulation, but that's what it really is, orchestration" (Alex), we were being invited to think about music as the base for an alternate metaphor. Immediately, the play begins. Possibility's initial delight soon shifts as we began to play with the metaphor in conversation and recognized ourselves in the example of the classical conductor. This realisation led to an awakening to the fact that orchestration is composed of both light and dark semantic qualities. There are no binaries here, just brilliant shades of ambiguous grey tones.

The play continues and the metaphor evolves through the suggestion that perhaps the music metaphor of "jazz" is more appropriate. As the notion of jazz as music metaphor gets tossed from one research partner to the other three key differences between manipulation and orchestration emerge: within the context of orchestration the leader must be willing to give-up control, allow for surprises (good and bad), and encourage play.

However, it is important to recognize that throughout the conversation, in the background there remains a familiar voice: "So there's still control, still manipulation… sounds good, but I'm not sure the difference is that easy… OK, so we orchestrate, how does that change anything" (Terry)? This voice from the home team too is key as it stimulates further reflection. From the sidelines that border the walls of the community of instrumental reason, this spectator-player excites and intensifies the play, forcing it in new directions as the other players respond to the heckles, jeers, and challenges. Within this conversation, which illustrates the dynamic play within the group, the voice of the local community

that represents the meta-metaphor calls out from the sidelines and penetrates the conversation by challenging emergent possibility, but perhaps encouraging generative possibility.

Do these fans in the stands that cheer on the home team and confront all that challenges traditional play control, stifle, or perhaps even suffocate play? How strong is the tether that ties us to our technical way of seeing?

It is in consideration these key questions that the radical hermeneutic emerges. Rather than a concrete thematic search, the radical hermeneutic challenges the hidden semantic currents; it stirs the waters, turning ripples into waves. In short, it precipitates the crisis to uncover the churning below the superficial currents seen by most. From a search for text that 'illustrates,' an investigative weeding out of evidence, the focus shifts to a critical listening to the conversation where the mention of community occurs. As described earlier, an attempt at deconstruction that unravels the mysteries, the unseen constraints, which limit possibility and close out the other.

I again add a note of caution. The relationships within any group are a kaleidoscope, a network that allows for a multitude of interpretation; what follows is but one way of interpreting the conversation.

Listening for Orchestration

I would venture to say that almost everyone is familiar in one way or another with some form of jazz. However, it is likely that few people, other than

those musicians that have had the opportunity to explore its versatile complex depths, appreciate the ability of jazz to adapt to an ever-changing social context. Perhaps the single most incredible quality of jazz that gives it possibilities as a contextual alternate metaphor for leadership is its capacity to be forever evolving and changing. It keeps reinventing itself from the first recordings of early jazz in the 1920's and 1930's, to the beginning of bebop in the 1940's, to cool jazz, hard bop, post bop, free jazz, avant-garde, and more recently fusion and even post-modern jazz. For jazz, generative possibility is a way of being.

Within all of these births and rebirths there are four qualities of jazz that make it significant to our quest for generative possibility for educational leadership (Sabetella, 1996, 1992/2000).

- *It gains its momentum from a clear-shared melody and steady rhythm.*

The uninitiated may tend to think of jazz as a loose throwing together of improvised music. But, if you listen carefully, the music carries a recurring melody, theme, or in jazz lingo "the head" (Sabetella, 1992/2000, p. 17) that the musicians share and respect. As well, in most compositions there is a steady rhythm that sets the pace and holds the music together, usually kept by the drums and bass.

- *It is rooted in improvisation.*

Improvisation is not just 'doing your thing' as may be believed by some, rather it is dependent on the artist's mastery of their instrument. Improvisation is a combination of technique and practiced skill balanced with intuition and initiative,

an inspired offering that is as much felt as it is played. Improvisation is constant play and exploration in search of new ways to interpret the melody in search of generative possibility.

- *It is a shared experience, a dynamic ensemble that depends on trust to flourish.*

Possibility in jazz grows out of the community of artists that come together to share in the unfolding experience. There is an inherent trust amongst the players, a giving and receiving of new or foreign space in which to play, triumph is not measured in perfect notes, but in a willingness to explore possibility and take the music in new directions. It is this trust within the ensemble that permits the uninhibited exploration; players recognize and celebrate that " there [are] always surprises, [which] sometimes work, and sometimes do not" (Sandy).

- *It exemplifies the notion of shared leadership.*

Leadership moves through a network of relationships, where melody passes from one member of the ensemble to the next. Each member of the ensemble plays with the theme, altering the harmonies, cadence, and rhythm, and often playing off the harmonies with dissonance that rocks the very foundation of the opening theme. Orchestration is a loosely planned journey with a natural beginning and end that unfolds in the performance of the music.

What is being described is a community that is open to generative possibility; a community that thrives on opportunities to encounter the other characterised by:

- consonance built on shared purpose, expectations, and hope;
- exploration of possibilities through intuitive improvisation;
- community trust that encourages and celebrates difference; and
- shared leadership that encourages play and invites possibility.

How does this characterization of community compare to the notion of community that is being portrayed within the professional conversation that makes-up the group action research described in this dissertation? Perhaps playfully one might ask, how does the notion of community being conveyed within the group conversation stand-up to 'the test of jazz'?

The Notion of Community within the Conversation: Jazz Further Explored

What follows is an attempt at a more radical interpretation of the conversational text by considering the notion of community that is woven into the conversation through the filter of jazz as an alternate metaphor to the meta-metaphor of business.

Risk-taking and difference

The first reference to "community" comes early in the first session. The research group was exploring ways to manage large classes with students of varying levels and needs. Alex put forward the notion that teachers must be able to improvise ways of responding to individual students' needs while maintaining a sense of unity within the classroom grouping. The conversation quickly turns to administration:

How do you translate that into what we do in administration, and do we see that in our administration? (Ken)

We do have administrators who do that, and they get in trouble, because they are risk takers. (Alex)

Who do they get in trouble with? (Ken)

They don't maybe get in trouble in a direct way, like a reprimand, but I think there is a perception that they are not quite playing by the rules. (Alex)

Alex seems to believe that improvisation, although acceptable and even commendable in the classroom, is less acceptable in administration and suggests that it is not always appreciated by supervisors. As the conversation continued others agreed, noting that school communities as well are often unappreciative of principals that improvise and take risks. Ambiguously Alex replies:

I know some communities accept [risk-taking]… some communities thrive on the fact that they see that their school is being run differently than what the 'run of the mill' school is being run. I was in a school that prided itself on "we're a little different out here, and you know what, we like it this way." (Alex)

Was it like that when you arrived? (Ken)

No, absolutely not! (Alex)

So how did you change that culture? (Ken)

Well I believe that relationships are the key, but that's my style. I see other people that use different styles and they are equally effective. I look at [one of my colleagues], and I think [he] has his own distinct style. No one could emulate that style and get away with it. (Alex)

It works for him. (Ken)

I believe that's the key! (Terry)

There is little doubt that our comments are intended to reflect positively on leadership that effectively builds relationships and develops community appreciation for being different. Initial consideration of the conversation might

lead to the conclusion that this type of leadership is positive in nature. But what underlying assumptions might there be in the context of the business meta-metaphor? One might interpret this as the language of 'market niche': the desire to create a school unique in nature, not "run of the mill." From this perspective, effectiveness can be equated with control over the community exercised through one's style and the desire to be "a little different" can be a closing of the community borders to create and protect exclusivity.

Might the conversation also reflect the characteristics of a community guided by jazz as metaphor described earlier: steady melody, intuitive improvisation, community trust, and shared leadership? The conversations can equally be seen to reflect: shared purpose and expectation in the desire to be different; an openness to possibility in the willingness to take risks; community trust supported by positive relationships; and shared leadership founded on the shared purpose, positive relationships and willingness to risk.

The likelihood is that even Alex would admit that in the complex mix of past experience and hope for the future the assumptions behind this conversation lie somewhere between these two interpretations. The point is that by playing with the interpretation through a recognition of the possibilities offered by the meta-metaphor as contrasted to the possibilities offered by the alternate metaphor we are given the opportunity to see in new ways and open ourselves to generative possibility. As Alex noted so poignantly in the conversation on jazz, "It doesn't

change us, but maybe it changes the way we see ourselves and each other" (see p. 113).

Control without control

The next mention of community emerges in the context of the ever-present concern of administration around the allocation of resources. This is without a doubt a recurring melody that plays out in steady measures. In both the pre-study reconnaissance and during the study, principals expressed frustration with the apparent contradiction found in the use of centralized controls for the allocation of resources and the mandating of local decision-making through SBDM.

The opening comment of the following excerpt typifies this paradox of 'control without control' as expressed by principals. But as the conversation continues there are subtle admissions that the control is not completely beyond the school leadership:

> One of the greatest frustrations of administrators is financial allocation, resource allocations [that] come out of an old fashion, top-down approach; "we [government, school boards, and senior administration] get what we want by funding under certain headings." So if we want more technology in the schools, instead of going out to the schools and finding out what is needed, we'll mandate the technology by issuing $45 a student for technology. Then we want you [principals] to go to the other end to get the "grassroots" input, to allocate those funds according to how your local community wants the funds allocated. Except we're not going to give you quite enough to do any of those things. (Kelly)
>
> For example, with mainstreaming we moved away from small groups of kids with highly trained professionals who worked with them, to moving them into classrooms of twenty five and thirty kids and throwing a much less expensive teacher aide at them. I mean, if you look at the population of teacher aides since I started teaching it has in fact worked quite nicely [italics added]. (Kelly)

> I really want to understand how we should interpret this game that we've described? You know, "I will give you some money, tell you what to do with it, and then I will send you out to do it in a consultative manner." (Ken)
>
> That's where we live! (Terry)
>
> And the interesting other side of that is it's very hard for us to go against the status quo of the culture that exists in our schools. And sometimes being an administrator you have to say, "yes that's what the teachers are saying, but that's not what I am going to do." And that's really hard for some people to do, for everybody it's hard, but it is really hard for some people. They get caught in the trap [italics added] of "94% of my budget is spent on staffing, or whatever the ninety something percent is," which is by choice. I mean to some degree it is by choice [italics added], because we still have trouble breaking away from thirty little bodies traveling to the classroom with thirty little desks stuck in rows and we stand-up in front… that whole model of education. (Alex)

Beyond the obvious frustration, two key points emerge: first that at least one of the changes [whether desirable or not] has "in fact worked quite nicely" (Kelly); and secondly "to some degree it is by choice" (Alex) that principals become trapped by focusing on the centralized controls instead of the possibilities to be found in local decision-making.

In combination, these two notions seem to suggest that school communities should not allow themselves to become trapped in the limitations of an existing structure, rather there are opportunities to be found in encouraging play within the structure that leads to generative possibilities.

History, identity, and the institution

The next significant reference to community required a rereading of the conversation regarding the building as it represents the institution called 'the school.' The initial interpretation of the conversation found in Chapter 4 (see pp.

92-96) generated the following points that can provide an opportunity to open the conversation to radical interpretation:

- The identity of the institution is constituted through a complex configuration of selective experiences and memories.
- The power of the institution stems from the community perception of the institution and is manifested in acts of the institution to defend itself from intrusive acts of others on the established values.

From these initial interpretive points a radical interpretation must go beyond the recognition that the institution's identity is composed of selected experiences and memories and attempt to understand how the selected experiences and memories colour, limit, and /or direct perception of the institution. In short, the radical interpretation must open the accepted identity of the institution to questioning, testing, and play.

There appears to be some attempt to do this as exemplified in my statement, "when you play with the perception [of the school division], you're playing with the perception of what the school division… has believed it is forever." More importantly, from this recognition springs the question, "But what is [our school division]?" (Kelly)

In an attempt to answer this question the group comes to the conclusion that the school jurisdiction identity is an ambiguous mix of two historical perspectives. There is the approved written history of the institution embedded in policy composed of selective corporate memory that "doesn't mention all our warts,

bumps, and bruises" that is designed to create a positive image for public consumption. Then there are the personal histories made up of unique individual understandings coloured by "our hopes and dreams, who we are today, who we are tomorrow, and what we brought with us when we came" (Kelly).

From the perspective of the meta-metaphor of business the relationship between these two histories can be interpreted as protecting the institution's market share; the institution protects its established identity by manipulating public perception through the creation of a selective written history. The accompaniment of personal histories by the written history may limit the individual's ability to engage in "remembering forward" (Carson 1992), the act of interpreting practice in an effort to open possibilities.

But how might this same relationship between the written history of the institution and the personal history of the individual be interpreted differently in the context of the alternate metaphor of jazz? The written history found in policy can be interpreted as an attempt to establish 'the head,' the shared community purpose and expectations, and the recognition of an individual's personal history as a means of celebrating difference, encouraging intuitive improvisation, and sharing leadership.

It may be possible to determine from the conversation, which of these two perspectives is more reflective of the attitudes within our group, but that would detract from the point being made. The significance of this conversation lies in the fact that we have already begun to question and test our assumptions related to

the accepted school jurisdiction identity. Further a more radical interpretation of the context through the lens of an alternate metaphor may have provided a means for remembering forward; an alternate metaphor may have provided a way of looking at the context differently that would open practice to the play that can lead to generative possibilities.

This brings us to the second point found in the initial interpretation of the conversation regarding the school as an institution. The search for generative possibility implies a willingness to question, test, and play with accepted perceptions and assumptions related to the school jurisdiction and/or school identity.

As noted in Chapter 4 (see pp. 98-99) "there is a tremendous amount of resistance to change" (Kelly), society does not "really want people that are different" (Terry), "people do not want diversity" (Kelly), and "whenever there is a problem [we] go back to a [our]comfort zone" (Sydney). This suggests that a community's established identity may act as a means to keep out others and other ways of being, which further suggests that any attempt to engage in play with the unknown other may represent a threat to the established identity of the community.

As the conversation continues the group attempts to identify how the identity of the institution is established. Kelly forwards the notion that it is related to "the cyclical nature of that group of people that are currently children in the school" as they return as parents and perpetuate the school's accepted values.

Terry again forwards the notion that it is related to "the building" as a embodiment of the institution's "traditions."

The conversation is animated through support for individual definitions of the representative nature of the institution; Kelly points to the children and Terry to the building. Whether described as the "cyclical nature of the group of people" or "traditions," both seem to describe a sense of identity that is established by the perpetuation of a set of accepted or established behaviours. The group clearly feels that this sense of identity is important in that it allows and promotes the feeling of community amongst its members. But does this need for a shared identity amongst members of the community necessarily foreclose on any encounters with the other?

This depends on the values promoted within the community as reflected in responses to questions such as:

- Does the shared identity create exclusivity, or does it promote shared purpose, expectations, and hope?
- Does the community require conformity, or does it encourage exploration and intuitive improvisation?
- Is the community suspicious of those that "are not quite playing by the rules" (Alex), or is there an inherent trust within the community that encourages and celebrates difference?
- Is there an identified leader within the community that guides action, or does the community promote shared leadership?

Some may see these questions as contrived, and they may be, given their allusion to the alternate metaphor of jazz. But they are contrived with the purpose of highlighting how a metaphorical perspective can ask one to consider perceptions, assumptions, and even practice in ways previously unconsidered.

Trust, relationships, and who decides

The next mention of community in the conversation goes directly to the issue of community trust and speaks to the relationship between a school community and the professionals that serve it:

> You know if you look back at the history of Alberta, it's an agricultural base; everybody was their own businessman. Every family was their own business, because it was the farm, right. An interesting film to watch is Why Shoot the Teacher. It was done out near Hanna. It deals with the attitude of the community to the professionals that come in, the teachers coming in from wherever they come to fly in and do whatever it is they do. And I believe that there is a big chunk of that that is still hanging around. That's where the thinking comes from. (Kelly)

The community being described in this excerpt does not appear to be either trusting of others or open to generative possibility. Yet, curiously this remark went unchallenged. It slipped unnoticed between remarks that talked of lifestyle and work ethic unnoticed. It is difficult to say after the fact that the lack of comment is an affirmation, but early on in the second session this issue of trust between the community and the professionals that work with their children resurfaces.

Perhaps what has come through in the conversation to date is the sense of separation between the school community and the larger community it serves.

The trust that exists within the jazz ensemble is an intimate trust that stems from the individual relationships amongst its members. It is a trust that celebrates the combined strength of the whole; it draws on members' individual strengths and willingly compensates for their weaknesses. Is this the relationship that exists between school and community? Does the school community as a member of the larger community serve the whole in a symbiotic relationship, or does the school give the impression that the community is there to serve the school? The relationship between school and community is described in the following excerpt:

> Well you know, when I worked with [Alex, we] always had... and of course it was in a community school... a community setting where community was willing to come in. [We] always had the coffee parties and whatever to bring parents in to have the conversations about what's up and coming and what should we be looking at. And I don't think that there is anywhere else in the system that that kind of reporting system happened, could have happened, outside of [our school]. If you want to bring change as part of what you are doing, you have to bring the parents, as well as the kids, along with you for the ride. The really tough part about that now is that our families are getting so busy that they no longer have the time or the interest to be involved in that way. So issues of communication from the school with the parents' group are huge. It's frightening to think of how little communication actually gets home... two-way communication. (Kelly)
>
> Yet at the same time, parents want to be more involved in the decisions of the school than ever before. (Ken)

Kelly is describing a very participative approach to parent involvement in the school. However, there is a telling comment woven into this passage, "If you want to bring change as part of what you [italics added] are doing, you have to bring the parents, as well as the kids, along with you for the ride." This notion of the community being taken "along for the ride" may be key. It alludes to the fact

that the school, and in particular the principal, is in the driver's seat. Change does not occur as the result of shared decision-making, but as a manipulating of the community on to the path chosen by the principal.

It is important to note that it is unlikely that Kelly's intent was to describe a process controlled by the school. In fact, it is more likely that Kelly felt that this was a participative approach, an opening of the school's doors to the community. It is exactly this type of hidden intend, often hidden even from the speaker, that radical hermeneutics seeks to expose. In the context of the meta-metaphor and said with conviction, a speaker assumes that the intended message is in fact the message received. A radical hermeneutic can challenge a speaker through alternate metaphors to reconsider the assumptions upon which a statement is founded and move beyond the innocence of intent and into the flux of multiple meaning. The radical hermeneutic seeks to open the message to doubt, to multiple meanings, and most of all previously unconsidered meanings.

Just such a opening to doubt occurs as conversation continues. An initially nostalgic look at the relationship of the principal to the parents in the community leads to the realization that what might be interpreted as trust may also include elements of fear and intimidation:

> I would hazard a guess that if you wanted to do something to initiate change in a school thirty years ago you might have had more chances of success than you would today. (Terry)
>
> Why do you say that? (Ken)
>
> The trust level was higher, with regards to schools, education, and teachers. Parents trusted what the system was doing and that their children

> would grow up to be educated, and be able to go out and look after themselves. Today, I think parents because of less trust want more say in what's happening to their children, how they're being taught. So when you start talking about changes, they're resistant to change because the trust isn't there. (Terry)
>
> OK, how do we deal with that, if the trust isn't there? (Ken)
>
> I might question that. I agree with you, it would have been easier to make changes [thirty years ago]. But I'm not sure it was totally trust at that point. It was a system where by no one would argue with changes because that was the educated person's idea. I'm agreeing with you, some of it could have been trust, but there were others [reasons]. I think of my parents, if they had to visit the principal's office there would be no questions. Parents would walk into that principal's office, and when they walked out they would not argue or discuss. It was a one-way conversation. (Sydney)

This sudden twist that places doubt on the trust of thirty years ago between school and home brings not only into questions those relationships, it also seems to go to the root of the separation between school and community today. It questions attitudes of and towards professionals, " no one would argue with changes because that was the educated person's idea" (Sydney) and suggests that in such a relationship leadership stems from the principal as the 'authority' within the school rather than from mutual trust.

In theory, this should have changed with the advent of school-based decision-making. This conversation begs further questioning. Has SBDM changed the attitudes of schools and communities? While parents feel the need for greater involvement in the decisions of the school, are they really being involved? Is what has been described to this point a polite superficial involvement through a contrived affirmation of decisions already made? Is there evidence of truly shared leadership, where parents are encouraged to explore with the professionals

generative possibility? Is there evidence of intuitive improvisation, where parents are passed the melody and encouraged to play? This and previous passages seem to suggest that decision-making is far more characterized by the notion of parents and community being taken "along for the ride."

This issue of 'who should decide' is woven continually into the conversation, as is the issue of the role of the professionals in the school in the decision-making process:

> Actually I think it was Plato or Aristotle who defined democracy in the way that the people had input and there was equality in that input, but it was only those people who were well enough educated to give the input. (Kelly)
>
> And only Plato got to pick who was educated enough. (Sydney)
>
> Yah, right! And then someone decided who was well enough educated to represent the society. I'm a big believer in community and input and involvement, however, sometimes when you get too many people involved, you can make mediocre something that has the potential to be really good. (Kelly)
>
> You've got to pick and choose what needs input. (Alex)
>
> That's right, you've got to pick and choose. (Kelly)

This is a telling admission that "you've got to pick and choose what needs input." This admission implies that the language of collaboration, shared decision-making, and community involvement has limits, limits that must be established by the principal, the 'educated' professional. There appears to be a fear that too much input detracts from the melody and steady rhythm of the school. This suggests that, contrary to the notion in jazz that an invitation to the other strengthens and enriches the music, the intrusion of the community as other into the plans of the school may be seen as detraction from the melody, a weakening of

the control of the bandleader over the steady rhythm. The group continues to struggles with the changes in the relationship between parents and the school:

> And the other thing is that school councils and parents move through. In a Grade 1 to 3 they're there for three years and then it's a new group in for another three years. And each group has a tremendous potential impact on the whole of the education that we are providing for children. Even though they are not decision-making formally, the government has set us up to listen or else. So, it isn't decision-making, but listen or don't listen at your peril as a principal or a superintendent. It is a very political process, it isn't necessarily a democratic process. And it comes to voice, who has voice and who doesn't. And the dilemma is in the right of the individual verses the rights of the community of learners, however big that community may be. And it's a setup, I believe that we had in [our school jurisdiction] better site-based input to what we needed, and not necessarily the system or the resources. I prefer that the resources are administered the way they are [by the principal]. (Kelly)
>
> You're talking about the day-to-day operations. (Sydney)
>
> Yah, but our parent councils[23] that we used to have I think generated more discussion, change, and interest in the things that were going on in school. (Kelly)
>
> They were non-political bodies. (Sydney)

This conversation recognises the potential power parents can exercise as they move with their children through the system and influence the "education that we are providing for [their] children" (Kelly). But rather than embracing the opportunity to engage these parents, there appears to be a certain resentment

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[23] Prior to the mandating of SBDM and school councils, schools in this particular school jurisdiction voluntarily had 'parent councils' that provided less structured informal input into school policy and the day-to-day operations of the school. Some form of parent involvement in the development of school policy and the planning of day-to-day operations was relatively common in Alberta schools prior to the implementation of school councils, but it was not uniform or consistent.

towards this ability to impact the system, " listen or don't listen at your peril as a principal or a superintendent" (Kelly). The politicalization of school councils, the voice of the community in the school, is seen as a "set-up" that has detracted from the principal's role as administrator of the school's resources. Yet somehow, prior to the politicalization, school councils were far more effective when they had no input to the administration of resources and concentrated on "things that were going on in the school" (Kelly). But can you separate the allocation of resources from the school's activities, "the day-to-day operations" (Terry)? Is this perhaps a rationalisation of the sense of intrusion felt by the professionals when community input encroaches on what they have traditional felt were their areas of responsibility?

These are difficult questions that reach at the heart of the ambiguity of the school role within the larger community. What seems to be suggested is that there can be school-based decision-making without the allocation of resources being put on the table. This begs one to question the meaningfulness of any collaborative decision that excludes the ability to improvise with the use of resources.

The conversation again turns to the issue of allocation of resources in the context of school-based decision-making and the ability to meet "the needs of the community." However, community in this passage refers to the community of professionals within the school and their needs, as opposed to the needs of the students and larger community:

> So that's the beauty to me of site-based, it can be based on the skills

and talents of the people that are there, and the needs of the community. (Alex)

Well the perfect example is the discussion we had about tech time[24]. You know that it makes more sense to have [a technician] that you are paying [less] a year to go around and change the batteries and clean the mice [instead of a higher paid teacher]. (Sandy)

But you can't just wholesale lay that out and say that's what we are going to do in [our school jurisdiction], because of all those other things that you're going to loose. And over time I would say that if we came back and looked at [our school jurisdiction] in ten years, you would see a technician in every one of those schools… every one! Because [the teachers that are now doing the job] will be gone, be retired, and you're not going to replace their tech time with other teachers. (Sandy)

Twice the time for the dollar value. (Ken)

That's right. But you aren't going to just wholesale… overnight make the change. (Sandy)

But we're waiting for these people to leave. (Terry)

Because they're doing a damn good job right now. (Sandy)

Because they're not doing it as their job, they're doing it above and beyond. (Ken)

The opening statement to this section of the conversation talks about basing decisions on "the needs of the community." But as the conversation continues there seems to be some question as to whether or not it is an issue of responding to the larger community need or to the notion of 'availability' within the school community. Principals often find themselves having to balance the larger community need and the resources available in the school community, and the example cited of allocation of time for computer maintenance is exemplary of the

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[24] "Tech time" refers to the allocation of time in a teacher's workload to maintain the school's computers, including installation and regular maintenance of hardware and software. Traditionally, the teachers that take on these responsibilities put in significantly more time than what is allocated within their workload.

dilemmas they face regularly. But rather than giving the dilemma back to the school or larger community to consider, principals often retain such burdens, appearing to be unwilling to give up control. There is no evidence in this passage, or in the passages that preceded and proceeded it, that any of us would even consider letting go of the decision and sharing it with members of the school community: parents, students, staff and other community members.

But does this responsibility have to rest solely on the principals' shoulders? Is a single solution for the school jurisdiction the best decision for each community? Or is this exactly the type of issue that is best solved through intuitive improvisation in a community of trust that shares leadership?

Again the radical hermeneutic does not come from the answers; it rises out of the questions. The short term or immediate responses seems obvious or simple. Hand the decision back to the community. But what does that mean? At what cost, if there is a cost at all? Not sharing decisions like this one, not allowing the network of relationships to generate possibilities, is perhaps opportunity lost or maybe even community lost.

An onlooker, with little or no knowledge of the situation or the reasoning behind the decisions, might even say that these teachers involved in maintaining the schools computers were being exploited. But what if the teachers themselves were asked whether they continued to do the technology tasks by choice or expectation, how might they respond? The radical hermeneutic might suggest that their continued commitment is a complex mixture of both choice and expectation,

as well as many other elements that exert pressure on the teachers to continue. The important point is that little may change without an opportunity to explore or flirt with unknown possibilities.

The fact that there is no evidence in this passage that the principals are willing to let go of the decision may be telling. There seems to be a fear of dancing in the unknown space beyond our assumptions and preconceived notions, our Gadamerian prejudices. Generative possibility lies not in what we think would happen, but in what might happen if we let go and allowed the intuitive improvisation to occur in the network of relationships.

As the second session was drawing to an end, there is an attempt to turn to the issue of what each of us can do in his or her daily practice to open possibility:

> We have to realize that things are not going to change. The parents are still going to be at the door tomorrow… the Superintendent is still going to be sending down edicts… there's still going to be policy to live within… there's still going to be the teachers who want you to be doing the discipline, when you need to be doing other things. But what can we do in our own practice, in our daily practice, recognising that we all practice differently? (Ken)
>
> But there are lots of commonalties too, in terms of what makes it work. Like there is no one at this table that doesn't believe that the people they work with will do a good job. (Alex)
>
> Absolutely! That's the first step! (Ken)
>
> If you don't have that belief to start with, you're in trouble. Because then you have to resort to the old "carrot and whip." (Alex)
>
> And yet that's easy to say, that is really easy to say, but very difficult to live when we have a teaching force… some who are getting tired, who have incredible expectations on them… parents, and community, and Achievement Tests… and many of them have demanding personal lives that interfere with their performance… any administrator whom has had to deal with a marginal teacher… You know, it is without doubt one of the

more painful experiences of your professional life. (Kelly)

But I still say, if you don't overall believe that they have the ability to do good a job then, you know, you shouldn't be in the job. (Alex)

Overall, yes. (Kelly)

In terms of quality, we have the quality, it exists. Motivation is another issue, and bringing out that quality within our staff, that is another issue. Even the people that are the biggest thorn in our sides at times have quality, and we [speaker's emphasis] have to tap that resource somehow. That is what SBDM, leadership, all of those words and phrased that we use… [pause] SBDM is the context, what it is we do is leadership. (Alex)

The initial question recognises our differences, perhaps in response to the earlier discussions on "leadership style" (see Chapter 4, p. 102, and Chapter 5, p. 114). Yet once again there is an ambiguous reaction as Alex immediately notes, "there are commonalties too." More specifically, there is the declaration that we must share the belief "that the people they work with will do a good job" (Alex). Amongst the declarations of agreement Kelly's single voice indicates misgivings with this categorical statement. Even this voice finally concedes, but there seems to be evidence that this concession is solicited and the dissident voice silenced by the statement "if you don't overall believe then you shouldn't be in the job."

This silencing of the dissident voice seems to run counter to the definition of professional conversation agreed upon by the group, which is unfortunate in that dissidence has potential. What possibilities might have emerged from the attempt to turn the conversation back to the issue of "expectation" and the inability to meet all the expectations? Three sources of expectation that seemingly hang over the heads of teachers and administrators are mentioned, "parents, and community, and Achievement Tests." If we exclude the Achievement Tests, the

remaining "parents and community" play key roles in the notions that support school-based decision-making. Further, the teachers that are burdened with these expectations also play a key role in school-based decision-making. These very same elements are meant to enable shared leadership and enrich the possibilities by bringing in experience and understanding of the children's needs. Instead, these expectations appear to detract, perhaps even paralyse, the ability of the school to function, which results in the creation of borders around the school community that may limit rather than open possibility. But what if these same expectations became the seed for community conversation, the opportunity to explore possibility, a driving force that motivates the community to look outside its boards for generative possibilities? Perhaps these same expectations that now paralyse can assist in the ongoing improvisation on the recurring melody through shared leadership and community trust.

Finally, in this passage there is a brief statement that carries tremendous significance in the way it exemplifies our existence, "many of them [teachers] have demanding personal lives that interfere with their performance" (Kelly). Buried in the concern for the expectations that burden teachers is yet another expectation. They must separate their personal and professional lives. Yet frequently you hear that as a profession teaching is a vocation not a job. Within a community, is not the overall well-being of its members important? Alex's ensuing comment speaks indirectly to this issue when making the distinction between 'quality' in terms of capacity and bringing out the quality through

'motivation.' Alex even emphasises that "we have to tap that resource somehow," placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of administration in general and the members of our group in particular. The statement, "SBDM is the context, what it is we do is leadership" is a significant distinction. Somehow the leadership function has been separated from the context. But as suggested within the jazz metaphor shared leadership is part of the context. This goes back to the need to see "what you are doing differently" (Kelly), through the lenses of a different metaphor as a portal to generative possibility.

The next reference to community comes early in the third session, after the reopening of the conversation that lead to the realization that more importantly than doing things differently, we must see what we do differently. Kelly brings into question our early assumption that our relationships in administration are characterized by conflict:

> There was this idea of conflict throughout the text of the first two sessions, and it was called "conflict" on one of these pages in the notes. I was thinking that it isn't so much conflict that we're dealing with as competing interests, things like who decides. One of the conflicts was the Achievement Tests; the homogenised perspective verses the individual. And yet site-based decision-making is supposed to make schools more individual and less homogenised. I just think that opposed to being conflict, it is competition, which is a little bit different. The system is struggling with "what do we stand for," and the competition is causing confusion. (Kelly)

What do we stand for in relation to the question of Logos[25], the question of French Immersion, on-line schooling? In an earlier text we talked about our division being the division that said, "we are going to do what we do well." Have we lost our direction, or found a new direction? (Ken)

No, we are defending our borders. (Kelly)

I think that is exactly what we are doing. I think we are rallying the troops and we're finding out who's got the heart for the fight, and who's looking for the honorable… not surrender… but negotiation. I think we are defending our borders. (Terry)

Instead of looking at the needs of the people, [school jurisdictions] are looking to change and be chameleons so that [they] can look like [they] are meeting everyone's needs[26]. That's a very different approach, I think. Because if you took the first approach, and you said you were going to stick to what you do well, you wouldn't care if your enrolment dropped, if you were doing what you did well and you were meeting the needs of your community. (Alex)

You're responding to your mandate. (Sandy)

From interpretation of earlier conversation comes the powerful critique of how we operate in a context of competing interests, a realization that what we are doing is not a question of meeting our communities' needs, but "defending of our borders." This appears to be a direct recognition of the desire to keep out the other in the form of unique alternate programming perspectives that detract from "what

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[25] Logos (the word) is a Christian based alternative program that uses the general curriculum, and is open to all children normally served in a standard classroom setting. Instruction promotes a disciplined environment, and is intended to be spiritually nurturing and intellectually challenging.

you do well" (Alex). There is a battle raging, and to survive we must "rally the troops" and find out "who's got the heart for the fight."

The tone and words illustrate the struggle, the recognition of the paradox, the question without answer. We are attempting to make sense of the conflicting notions that we live with daily.

There is an obvious cynicism associated with school jurisdictions that offer an array of program options, they "are looking to change and be chameleons so that they can look like [italics added] they are meeting everyone's needs" (Alex). Yet equally there is concern that not opening the school jurisdiction to other possibilities will negatively impact schools. There is recognition of the importance of "looking at the needs of the people" (Alex). There is a tearing, a struggle between responding to the "wants" of the community and defending the status quo and shutting out opportunity. There is almost a sense that in some ways neither of these options will fully meet the real community needs.

But the business metaphor is strong, and in true form rides in like a 'white knight' to make sense of the struggle:

> So that's a very different approach. I would call that from my

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[26] Key to the changes made to Alberta's education system in the early 1990's was the notion of 'choice.' Parents may choose the school their children attend. However, school jurisdictions must give priority to their resident students based on availability of classroom space and any special services students need. In an effort to attract resident and non-resident students many school jurisdictions have developed a variety of alternate programming options. Government funding follows a student to the school jurisdiction of choice.

> private enterprise side 'niche marketing.' You say this is the niche we're going to be in, and we don't want to build the $140,000 home, we want to build $400,000 homes. Yes, we know we are only going to sell 10 homes a year, but that's fine with us, we're meeting our clients' needs, maintaining our quality, and we can give very good service and we'll make this much money. (Alex)

Fortunately, even as a response to the query is being conjured up, uncertainty echoes in a wondering, perhaps even disbelieving question, "And that's our goal?" (Terry) Terry, whom to date has championed the voice of the business meta-metaphor (see pp. 114-115), in hearing the illustrative example of 'niche marketing' wonders if this is the goal of the education system.

As the third session progressed, the conversation continued to look at school-based decision-making and the context within which it operates:

> I think that we're facing a crisis with site-based decision-making, quite frankly. And it's the 'collaboration' word. I think we are fatiguing all of our collaborators. (Kelly)
>
> So do I, so do I! (Terry)
>
> Our teachers, our kids, our school councils, I think we are even fatiguing our school boards. I think everyone is tired of this thing called collaboration. (Kelly)

The statement, "this thing called collaboration," speaks of a lack of authenticity in the act, perhaps a reflection of the earlier conversations about manipulation. Does the resulting fatigue come from the burden of shared leadership, or a lack of trust in the sincerity of the act of collaboration? As the group continues to explore reasons for the fatigue we discover that the question is more complex and not easily answered:

> Central office and school boards are more [tired of collaboration]. I think it is because they're getting more high-level complaints. (Terry)

> If in fact a failure or a problem is a good thing, then what we need to look at is what does that tell us? And what are some possibilities? So if I don't have a school council that is willing to come and do, then what does that mean? Does that mean that I'm not collaborative enough? Does that mean that the parent community is looking for some different avenue for input? Does it tell me that they're quite satisfied with the way things are and their lives are too busy to be involved (Kelly)?

This was an unfolding, a searching for answers, but was it a search for possibility, an exploration of the melody? These questions are pushing at the edge of the borders of our institution called school, but the responses that were emerging from the group conversation did not yet seem to respond in kind and turn a shoulder to the walls that surround our school in an effort to assist in the opening of our borders. This is evidenced in the response that followed the question of why a school council may back away from its involvement in school-based decision-making:

> I have always had the theory that community becomes involved when they are worried… (Ken)

> …and not happy. Community backs off and gives lots of space to the school and to the people that run the schools and are in the classrooms when they are happy or when they are satisfied with the service. (Terry)

> We've come past the deficit and are into a new cycle. And if action research is a cycle, here it is! [Our school jurisdiction] is now moving into the next cycle where we no longer feel that we have to, we don't need to say this is [how we are going to do] it. There is a little more money in the system and we can be a little more creative in our responses. We can respond to what the community is saying and what… [pause] I think you're right, I think you are very right, that possibility exists in context. There are possibilities, but they always exist in context. Context plays a role in the issue of possibilities. We are in a different context than we were two and a half-years ago. (Ken)

Again, there appears to have been a returning to the language of business to rationalize the situation. Possibility is limited and hinges on the context, the

reality of a particular time and setting. Equally this could have been an opportunity to illustrate how unlimited possibility can exist in a limited structure. But as Kelly continues to attempt to describe the context this does not appear to be the case:

> I just note the real fatigue on the part of staff. Even trying to get a professional development committee, trying to get another staff member to sit on a [jurisdiction] committee. There is just raw fatigue. Part of the fatigue is just dealing with politics that go with the decision-making. What is perceived to be the constant interference from the few parents that do this [a gesture is made] all over everything that's done. So people say, hey you're the Principal you can do that one, I'll go teach my class and leave me alone when it comes to collaboration. (Kelly)
>
> It's a fear of sticking your neck out. People don't want to be involved on a committee. (Sandy)

This is a clear description of the perceived context. The sharing of leadership is corrupted by the "politics that go with the decision-making" (Kelly). The melody is set but continually tampered with by exterior forces. A short while later in the conversation as the group continues the description turns to the role of the school board and central administration as a force that is exterior and separate from the school:

> The school board and central office play a very big role in influencing what happens inside those [school] buildings. You know, I think it's a weakness of this system. Again, it's not acting pure. It's not letting factors in [the school] community be the driving force to how they do things inside that building. That's not allowed to really happen. It's sprinkled with the responsibilities of Trustees and central office. Those people have responsibilities in the educational system. And they're an exterior force that has a lot of influence, and a lot of influence on what happens inside the buildings. (Terry)

But one might ask if this power structure is an interior control, rather than an exterior force. Might the school board be better described as 'keepers of the

identity'; a border patrol that monitors the community to ensure that its members remain within the structure and do not strike out on their own? Assuredly, some decisions are decentralised, but they are encapsulated in policy with all the necessary controls and constraints that are meant to guarantee the resulting decision-making remains within the perimeter. The result is a classical symphony meant to replicate the composer's vision for the music; variations are limited to an acceptable range of expressions of individuality. Policy attempts to prevent excursions into the flux to encounter the unknown other for fear that the result will exceed the security of preconceived possibility.

Amazingly, the final fleeting reference to community appears to allude to this exact point in reference to the school jurisdiction's Three Year Education Plan[27]:

> If you look at... the Three Year Education Plan, there are some jurisdictions that go through an elaborate community orchestration, that "good" manipulation. To be able to say "we've done this, and this, and look at this plan we have unfolded." My feeling is that the Three Year Education Plan is key, it's important, it sets up the picture, it gives the

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[27] The Alberta Government has established a system of Three Year Plans for its departments and the related organizations that receive public funding. Alberta Learning, the governments education department, must construct, and review and revise annually, a Three Year Business Plan that is aligned with the goals of government. In turn, each publicly funded school authority must prepare and forward a Three Year Education Plan that is aligned with the goals of Alberta Learning plan. At the end of each year the school authorities must prepare an Annual Education Results Report that summarises the school authorities' results in relation to the outcomes identified in its Three Year Education Plan (Alberta Learning, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 2000, and 2001a).

guidelines. (Ken)

This is an affirmation of the importance of the Three Year Education Plan as a key tool that guides the direction taken by the school jurisdiction. But perhaps not surprisingly, it too is manipulated. Although I refer to the consultation process as "good manipulation," based on the proceeding statement that begins with "to be able to say," community discussion contains few elements of jazz beyond a recurring melody and steady rhythm. Based on the general tone of the comment, it seems difficult to imagine that I was alluding to a community consultation that promotes intuitive improvisation, shared leadership, and community trust.

In the final session, the term community never arises. The group concentrates on bringing the conversation to some sort of conclusion, and in so doing, there are fewer descriptive expressions of our lived experience.

Drawing on the Interpretation: Technical and Radical

What is being described throughout the previous section is not the difference between two communities, but the ambiguity of looking at the same community from two fundamentally different metaphorical perspectives, the meta-metaphor of business and the alternate metaphor of jazz. Generative possibilities for educational leadership do not flow out of our ability to change ourselves and others, but as noted earlier generative possibilities lie within our ability to see ourselves and others differently.

Throughout the text, even after the notion of jazz as an alternate metaphor is introduced, the notion of community is seldom congruent with the earlier identified qualities of jazz: recurring melody, intuitive improvisation, community trust, and shared leadership (see pp.116-117). Although at different points each of these individual characteristics are manifest to some degree or another; they do not appear to play in harmony. However, this should not be surprising given the extent to which the business metaphor is etched in to every aspect of the institution.

This interpretation of the text using jazz as an alternate metaphor is not meant to be judgmental. As educators we live within the ambiguity of the struggle for control (see Chapter 4, pp. 89-98). The key notion behind SBDM was to move the decision-making closer to the classroom (see Chapter 2, p. 33). Yet the decision to institute SBDM in Alberta was accompanied by the implementation of a number of system wide controls (see Chapter 2, pp. 22-24). But what if we operated from the perspective of "infinite possibility within a finite structure" (see Chapter 3, p. 60). Rather than mourning the lack of control over the system-wide structure, there appears to be merit in focusing the energies of the school community on the local possibilities for educational leadership in the context of a shared alternate metaphor that has the potential of creating openings to generative possibilities.

The alternate metaphor of jazz is but one example of how an alternative metaphor can provide a context in which to interpret key notions within

conversation, in the context of this study these include community, educational leadership, and generative possibility. Another alternate metaphor will produce a different interpretation, as will the alternate metaphor of jazz produce a different interpretation in the hands of another. There are no ultimate or absolute interpretations; a radical hermeneutic depends on this notion. Each journey into the flux is a different experience found within the struggle to construe, for without chaotic venturous play you have not visited the flux. Generative possibility, an attempt to encounter the unknown other, however realisable or not remains impossible without an acceptance of the intuitive quality of the interpretative act.

Therefore, the purpose of the interpretation is not to identify this or that possibility, but to invite the questioning and testing of the meta-metaphor that offers the potential for an opening of the borders to the flux, alternative metaphor, and generative possibility.

Hope Entwined

As I have stated before, I have tried to show how my personal act of action research is entwined with the group research. I opened this chapter with a confession, which essentially amounts to the fact that I entered the act of interpretation without a clear understanding of exactly what I wanted to do or how I intended to do it. Within the tenor or voice of the alternate metaphor of jazz it might be said that I was engaging in an intuitive improvisation based on the

recurring melody of generative possibility, trusting that the voices of my research partners would lead me to new insights.

Throughout the text I frequently mention of the search for hope: hope for professional conversation, hope for new ways of seeing educational leadership, hope for an encounter with the other, all of which build towards hope for unfolding generative possibility.

But hope does not exist independently of people's lives. As demonstrated in the early interpretation of the principals' experiences of school-based decision-making, it lives in our understandings and interpretations of our existence. Where one person may see nothing but pain, another will see possibility and hope for the future. It is the result of a complex interweaving of personal and shared experience, emotion, and inter-relationships. Hope is a place of and for the soul.

Where in these interpretations, technical and radical, does hope live?

For some the declarations throughout the radical interpretation such as the final interpretive remark, "it seems difficult to imagine that I was alluding to a community consultation that promotes intuitive improvisation, shared leadership, and community trust" (see p. 146), may seem barren of hope. But I would forward that it is exactly this type of interpretation that offers hope for generative possibility. These remarks beg the questions, "Why is it like that?" and "How else can it be?" They invite an opening into the flux in search of generative possibility.

Hope lies in every emergent question within the almost thirteen hours of conversation, as well as, in the emergent questions that spring from the interpretive act.

But from where do these emergent questions come, and how might they be encouraged?

In the context of the research, the emergent questions come from and are encouraged by a combination of elements:

- a willingness to engage in professional conversation, barren of the competition for resources and rich in the desire to question and test one's own prejudices;
- recognition of the *Ge-stell* of the dominant metaphor or meta-metaphor that enframes one's way of being in the world;
- a questioning of the meta-metaphor in an attempt at breaking through the borders;
- a willingness to wade out into the flux and explore alternate ways of seeing in search of generative possibility; and
- the capacity and strength to return home and live the possibility.

With these elements as a frame of reference, there is yet another interpretation to consider, our interpretation of the action research experience as members of the group.

Our Interpretation of The Research Experience

The hope was to have the research partners engage in a collective attempt to change our practice as education leaders by re-visioning our notions of education leadership through professional conversation that opens our experience to questioning, testing, and play in an attempt to open ourselves to generative possibilities. Is there evidence that this happened?

Reflections on professional conversation

All of the research partners seemed particularly appreciative of the opportunity to engage in conversation that had meaning beyond of the everyday issues of operating schools, as expressed by Sandy as beyond the "mundane":

> Unless you're taking a university class, or you're at a workshop, you don't have a chance to dialogue with other professionals. And when we do have a chance to dialogue with other professionals, it's usually about mundane things.... To talk about things from the abstract, mundane, to the serious and everything in between is a great opportunity. Because no matter how abstract we get, there's a bit of truth and a bit of integrity in those comments.

This is not to say that this freedom of expression did not result in frustration at times. Sandy in particular expressed frustration that there was not the opportunity to explore some notions in greater depth:

> We were really scattered, and I would have liked to have gotten down to some real hard debate, knock 'em down drag 'em out debate on some things. Not to find out where people stand, but to find that continuum as to where people stand to push peoples' thinking from one side to the other. And we started to get there sometimes, and then we went off in another direction.

There is a sense that Sandy would have liked the conversation to focus on some particular issues, to come to a final understanding of sorts. But as one might

suspect, other members of the group had other impressions. For Kelly the research appears to have provided opportunity for reflection and sharing that otherwise would not have occurred:

> What this group has done for me, it has given me just a little bit of strength and courage in terms of where I'm going and what I'm doing. Because a lot of the conversation you get to listen, you get to make the connection with all the things that are happening. And it gives an opportunity to reflect on what it is that's happening in the situations that are most stressful to me at school. And what I think this group has helped me gain is the confidence that the tension that is created in my school is positive tension. I actually feel quite joyful about going to school right now. I think that the direction for next year is very positive, and that grows out of that tension, the confrontation, and the dis-harmony that I so much fear.

The statement, "the tension that is created in my school is positive tension" (Kelly) opens the possibilities offered by dissonance that Kelly has not previously considered.

This is not to say that we were able to consistently engage in conversation that was free of one-upmanship or out-arguing one another, and seriously engage in active listening, weighing and considering the experiences and opinions of our colleagues. As noted in the interpretation found in this chapter, there are examples of voice being silenced within the conversation. But these examples effectively contrast the many other conversations that exemplify the free flowing exchange of ideas. An appreciation of the freedom to "think out loud" and play with notions free of criticism but open to critique is expressed at various points during the sessions, and summed up in the following examples:

> [I appreciate being able to] listening to others and being able to

> express myself in a very unthreatening atmosphere. Here, I am not fighting for resources for my school or trying to win an argument about why you should fund professional development, programs, or any of those things. (Alex)

Terry went further, emphasising the opportunity to "think again" in the following excerpt:

> One thing that [the sessions have] definitely done is give me an opportunity to think out loud and to just throw things out. It's been a long time since I've had the opportunity to listen to people, and at that moment to take what they are thinking and throw in without worrying about what is politically correct. It was good to be able to think again [italics added]. It's nice to have an opportunity to sit back and to think about the job and to talk about the job, instead of doing the job. And that's what I'm finding that this is… it's fresh [speaker's emphasis]!

These excerpts appear to support the notion that conversation free of competition for resources provides opportunities for questioning, testing, and play.

Did the professional conversation lead to questioning, testing, and play that opened our understandings to generative possibility?

This question is complex and relies not only on the group conversation, but also on our interpretation of the conversation. There seems to be significant evidence that questioning, testing, and playing with our existing understandings occurred on the personal level, as well as within the group dynamic, as evidenced in the way Blades' three questions (see Chapter 1, p. 10), which can helpful when considering the post-modern perspective, seemed to continually creep back into the conversation. These questions encouraged our interpretation of experiences; they guided conversation, and guided us towards the flux and the radical hermeneutic:

> You know, one of the [things] I appreciate about this was [the] approach, which was to ask a question and seek an answer.... And that's what we've been doing. We have been describing what is there. And there is a tremendous depth of discussion of what it is like. The next question that follows is "Why is it like that?" And we've had a lot of discussion about why we think it is like that... it's our understanding of why it is like that. And there isn't a solution being thought so much as there is that question of "How else could it be?" Like could it look differently than it does, should it look differently than it does? And you know that's kind of interesting too, because... there isn't a simple answer to a simple question. (Kelly)

Kelly recognises that possibility lives within the question, not within a simple answer. This is a powerful revelation that signifies a shift, and perhaps even a re-visioning of educational leadership. Alex seems to be moving in the same direction:

> I think the possibilities are along similar lines. I think maybe we have already started in that direction with people recognising that each school might need to re-sort, re-hash, and re-discuss and so on. I think that needs to happen now. That's where possibilities for us lie, in reassessing, almost going back to the questions. I think that every school needs to do that now. How else could it be? And do we want to make it that way? (Alex)

I strongly believe that these comments show that the group is questioning and testing previously unquestioned experience, and that we are willing (if not fully ready) to play with possibility. The interpretation offered in this chapter continually points to the rolling tide of questioning, looking for answers unfound, and re-questioning. There is an ongoing struggle, personal and shared. Alex's remark, "I think that every school needs to do that now" is hopeful.

However, there is a more difficult question within the question. The preceding interpretation contains many references to the notion of "an encounter

with the unknown other" within the flux, and that generative possibility is found within this encounter, the radical hermeneutic. But how does one prepare for an encounter with the unknown, and were we any closer to this ultimate hope for the research?

In the description of the research partners (see pp. 54-56), it is noted that in two cases members of the group that have experienced a "principal and vice-principal relationship." This is but one example of the types of relationships that existed within the group prior to the research. Yet there is evidence in the conversation that in many ways we remained "unknown" to each other prior to the study. At a very basic level we were to each other the first of the unknown others that had to be considered:

> What's been really good about this group is that each of us does things just a little differently. And I think what it does is it makes us factor into site-based decision-making the differences we all bring to the table. And if instead of competing with those differences, we can turn it to an appreciation of the differences, a celebration of differences, then I think what we do with site-based decision-making can work.... I think that it calls on us to do a better job of working with each other, and the whole trust issue is part of it. (Kelly)

Sandy reinforces this notion, and goes as far as to suggest that through the research, through the professional conversation, there is a greater ability to understand one another, interpret conversation:

> I've enjoyed listening and getting to know [everyone] a little bit more. I think for me sitting around the principals' table or admin council table, it makes me more confident in my thinking. I had a conversation on the phone today, and I know that I can interpret what you [referring to another participant] said as being who you are, and it's different than hearing from someone I don't really know. (Sandy)

There appears to be a growing understanding of the impact we can have on the other, a reflective practice that looks less at what has been accomplished, and more at the impact we can have on others. Kelly goes further, and considers how we give voice to some and silence others in our desire for control:

> As an administrator I sometimes wondered if I was constantly backtracking on my own decision-making because I'm constantly going back over it and over it. This gave me a little bit of a new dimension for going over it in terms of a reflective process. And so I'm thinking now, who do I include and who do I exclude when I'm making decisions.... And how do I include them, and how do I exclude them? Because there are a variety of ways that I include and exclude people... allow voice and take voice away. And why is that I exclude some people and include others, because some of those reasons are not necessarily very honorable. It is only in the reflective process that you think that I may have included or excluded somebody on the staff. Very Machiavellian! [*rolls of laughter*] In truth, I also like to be in control, so letting it out is a hard thing to do. (Kelly)

This statement alludes to the emerging understanding that what we say and what we do is in-formed by our understanding of who we are (and the way we are) in the world. This is a profoundly important notion to consider as we reflect on the educational leadership we provide, promote in others, and support within our educational community. Is this what we have called intuition?

> I think that a lot of decision-making is intuition... and I think we have to allow for other people's intuition to work. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. We're so afraid to make a mistake, and when I look at what are the possibilities when you start to let go of that and allow the intuition to work... The whole issue of educational leadership, educational leadership is different for every one of our colleagues and every one of us... and we keep trying to define it. It keeps coming back to that network of relationships, making sure that the dynamic between people is strong... that honesty, that trust. (Ken)

The struggle continues, the reflection incomplete, but the answer within is to let go. The only preparation for an encounter with the unknown other is to trust in your intuition and the intuition of others. Is this an internalisation, or perhaps an allusion, to the four qualities of jazz: recurring melody and steady rhythm, intuitive improvisation, shared leadership, and trust?

Was practice changed?

Part of the original intent of the study as action research was to alter or change practice. Although I believe that the above excerpts are evidence of change in the way we see and experience our practice, there was only limited evidence that our practice of educational leadership in the workplace changed while engaged in the study. As noted earlier (see Chapter 3, p. 56), I must be cautious not to reveal the identities of my research partners through specific examples. But generally, as issues and questions emerged in the day-to-day events of our schools and school division, the research partners engaged colleagues in the exploration of possibilities in ways they had not previously considered. Rather than moving as quickly as possible to a solution to an identified problem, they would focus on problem setting by exploring the event or issue with their colleagues through thoughtful questioning.

As well, within the conversation there are hints that involvement in the research may further alter practice over time. The evidence to support this claim

again grows out of Blades' three questions (see Chapter 1, p. 10), which open critique and help us reflect on possibilities for the future:

> I think that the administrative team needs to have a very careful look at why we are doing what we are doing. Those same questions, you know, what is it like, why is it like that, and how else can it be? There needs to be a stronger philosophical base for the decisions that we are making.... I think that the difference quite frankly has to do with spirituality and valuing, and I think that we lost our way a little bit in terms of the valuing. What should we be valuing here? (Kelly)

As a group, we seem ready to linger in the questions, rather than moving towards the simple response. The questions are fundamentally more complex and less pragmatic in nature; they go to the root of the notion of generative possibility. There is a sense that we realize that possibility lies within professional conversation:

> It would be nice if we could do this kind of conversation with small groups of staff in our schools. People would get to know you, and you would get to know your people. It is so critical because the teachers are no different than what we are; they're craving these kinds of discussions too.... You know, it's that mutual give and take of trust. (Sandy)

The most hopeful of responses to the question, "Was practice changed?," lies in the possibility that in recognition that "teachers are no different, they're craving these kinds of discussions too" the principals will engage their school communities in ongoing questioning of their practices and experience.

From the principals' interpretations of their experience cited above it appears that they are poised to refocus on local possibilities for educational leadership.

But what is the relationship between the notions that have lead to the opening of our group to the possibilities for local generative possibility: notions such as meta-metaphor, alternate metaphor, the flux, and professional conversation? How might one conceptualize how these elements interact, how might one describe the complex network of relationships between them?

The proceeding chapter is an attempt to provide a conceptual framework that provides one way of understanding of the complex relationship between these notions. The hope is that others will consider the possibilities that professional conversation inspired by a shared alternate metaphor may offer their school jurisdiction and/or school community.

Chapter 6: Approaching Understanding

The following conceptualisation, is not meant to represent reality, but to present one of many possible ways of seeing and understanding; a radical hermeneutic that acknowledges a multiplicity of truths, a playing field for visualising, coping, and playing with the concepts and notions that have emerged within the research.

Borgmann (1992) writes of crossing the "divide" and Blades (1997) of returning from "the abyss" encountered through the deconstruction or challenge of post-modernity; breaking through or transcending the walls of instrumental reason that enframe our technical society. Caputo's (1987) notion of the flux, like Borgmann's divide and Blades' abyss, is an ambiguous space of convergence: chaotic, disquieting, anxious, and even radically disturbing. Caputo suggests that this is not a space to be understood, interpreted, or "come to grips with" (p. 271), but space to be explored, coped with, "construed...and best of all, played with" (p. 271), a space of inter-play.

How might this space be conceptualised in light of educational leadership?

The flux, in which we live and which lives within us, is rendered imperceptible by the enframing of the meta-metaphor, a wall of so called "instrumental reason" of positivism that protects/imprisons and limits possibility to objective reality based on observable data collected from experience; the same "instrumental reason" that influenced Taylor's Scientific Management (1911) and Tyler (1949) technical approach to curriculum referred to early in Chapter 1.

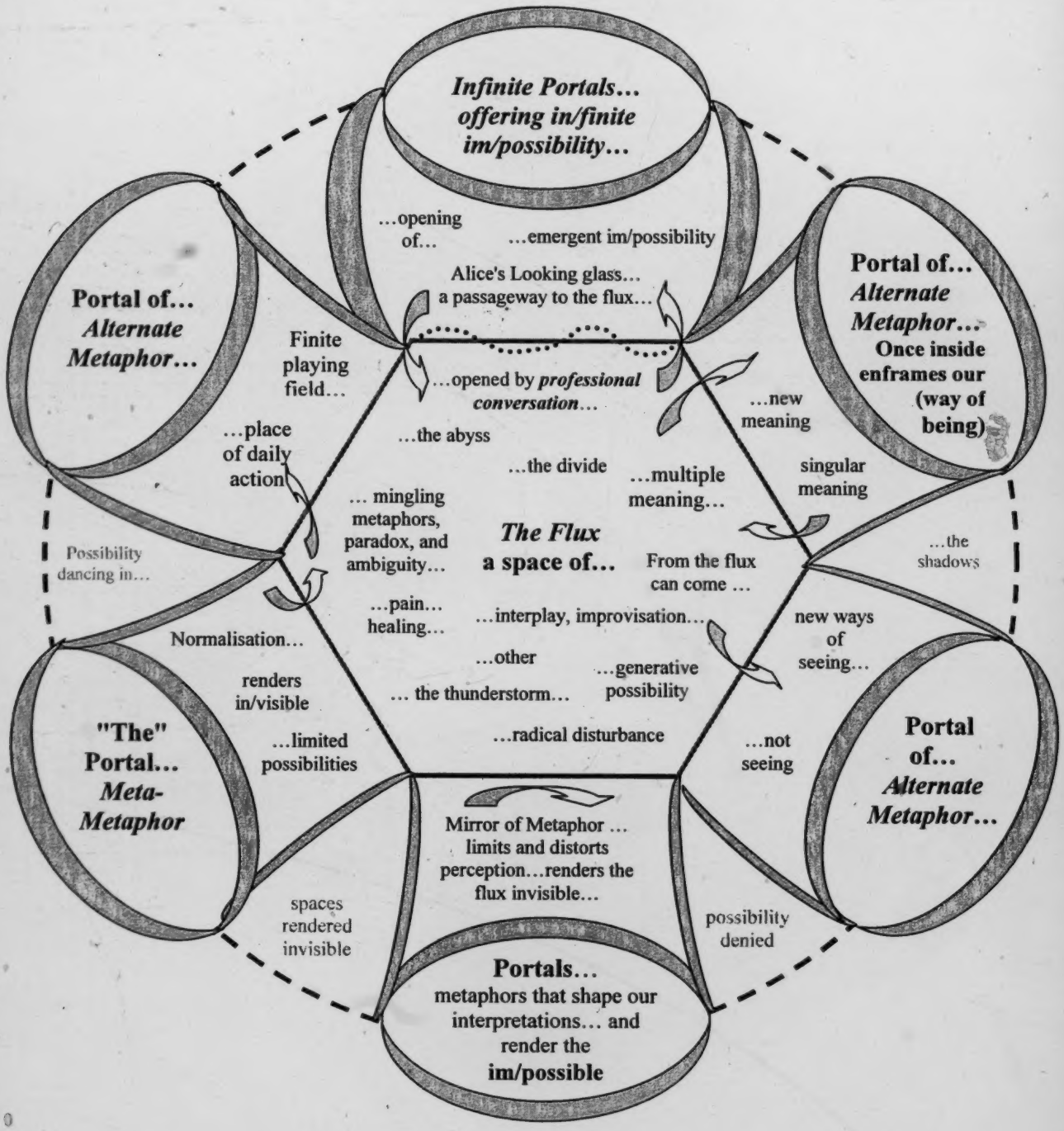
However, as also noted earlier (see Chapter 1, pp. 8-10 & Chapter 3, pp. 67-68), the mere recognition of the existence of our enframing kindles uncertainty, often setting in motion a questioning of our notions of reality.

As we more closely examine that which we accept as truth, we begin to hear muffled noises coming from beyond the borders of our reality. Frightened and encouraged, the further we venture the more likely it is we will encounter the commotion, the swirling incomprehensible activity of foreign life beyond. The discovery is exciting and confusing... what is it... why is it there... where did it come from... what does it offer... how can it be... what does it mean... how will it touch me... questions unanswered, unasked. Before us, around us, within us, we sense possibility dancing in the shadows. Even before we break through the illusion of instrumental reason, we find ourselves within the flux as it spills into our reality. As we question and challenge the reality of daily experience, we begin to dream of another way of seeing [perhaps being], where generative possibility emerges from an attempt to encounter the yet unknown other.

Towards a Conceptualisation

What follows is the conceptualisation of a radical hermeneutic sphere. As with any visual rendering of a concept, it can only capture a finite set of possibilities. The aim of this visual is not to render all possibilities, but to ignite thought and reflection; cogitating, musing, and pondering the possibilities, the interplay between/amongst metaphors that enframe our way of being and thinking about our world, and the im/possibilities that may emerge from the interplay.

Figure 1: Conceptualising the…
Radical Hermeneutic Sphere
(Like the dimples on a golf ball)



A radical hermeneutic sphere is but one way of conceptualising our relationship to and with the flux, [not to be confused with a hermeneutic circle]. Rather than the flux being somewhere out beyond our experience, a place to be journeyed to, the sphere suggests that the flux is at the very center of our existence. It is part of us and us part of it, not foreign, but alienated or isolated by the metaphors that enframe our understandings of reality.

There is no one portal or conduit that will carry us to the flux, no single meta-metaphor that describes our relationship with the flux. Even within the shared journey of the research group, although we may have traveled together and through professional conversation helped each other along, the experience of the journey is different for each of us. Our experience of the flux is as unique as we are individual.

An awakening to the presence of the flux might seem like a journey interrupted. In our technical enframing, with method and purpose we proceed on our linear path. But are we spinning our wheels, going nowhere fast? It is like standing between face to face mirrors, as we look forward we see the reflection of what is behind us, and as we try to focus on what can be seen in that reflection we see what is in front. *Ad infinitum*, we seem to be gazing long distances into both past and future simultaneously, but in fact all that we are really seeing is where we are. There is nothing new, no 'other,' no alternative way of being, no new possibility, simply a reflection of our present location; we are enframed in the predelineation of experience, or so we think.

Somehow we manage to lose our way. At some point, no matter how well we plan or perhaps scheme, unless we are oblivious to all else that surrounds us sooner or later we must inevitably become entangled in the thin veil of instrumental reason that protects/imprisons us from the turbulence, the inherent difficulty of life.

The Radical Hermeneutic Sphere

The conceptualisation of a radical hermeneutic sphere emerged out of my own need to visually interpret some of the more abstruse notions revealed in the unfolding of the research experience. As I played with the visual interpretation I found it important to remember that language and visual representation are tricky things, and their pervasive/persuasive quality should not be allowed to draw one into a single way of seeing. The lines that form the spaces within the visual are nowhere as clear, proportional, or solid as they appear, if they exist at all.

Meta-metaphor, power, freedom, and flux

As noted earlier (see Chapter 2, p. 51), meta-metaphor is a notion that is akin to the meta-narrative, a "univocal discourse" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xx) with it's claim to represent a final truth or as Lyotard (1984) defines them, "narrations with a legitimating function" (p. 19). It is a reference to the dominant metaphor within a society. Based on earlier arguments and further evidence within the conversations of the research group, I believe that there is little or no doubt that the business metaphor is the meta-metaphor for the burgeoning

globalized society. It symbolises the *Ge-stell*; it is a descriptor for the power that shapes, forms, and structures action in Western education.

The business meta-metaphor describes a technical space where possibility is limited to a finite playing field of binary notions that make-up daily action. Change involves the adaptation of resources, including people, to targeted outcomes. Under the guise of 'what is reasonable,' attempts to control and limit possibility through management practices, strategic planning, and consensus building become the agency of power. Power endeavours to conceal the healthy agonistic mutual interdependence between conceptual opposites that within their shared meaning can expand the network of generative possibilities. By preaching the dominance of one or the other of a binary set, power renders the absolute to consensus, and in so doing, closes down the conversation, silences the voice of the 'other,' and extinguishes any hope for divergent generative possibility.

The notion of 'power' as described by Foucault is particularly pertinent to this argument in that, rather than focusing on semiotic meaning, Foucault focuses on "relations of power" (1980, p. 114). From this viewpoint, power is not seen from the perspective of how individuals exercise it, but how power is entwined in a network of relationships within a structure. The focus therefore is on the "interweaving of effects of power and knowledge" and the way they are "profoundly enmeshed in social structures" (1980, p. 109). Blades (1997) describes these effects as "procedures of power" (p. 95), noting that they are not

fixed within a meta-discourse on power, but that "power in every discourse functions through a [different set] of procedures" (p. 110).

As pointed out earlier in the study (see Chapter 2, p. 14), the interpretive act is "a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest" (Foucault, 1988, p. 154). What better way to shatter meaning, the radical hermeneutic, than by the uncovering of our assumptions through the questioning, testing, and play that may occur in professional conversation?

Contrary to this productive/repressive power of constraint – productive in that it allows for action and repressive in that it excludes the other and limits possibility – power attempts to repress freedom as it is couched in the meta-metaphor. As demonstrated through the consensus process, the seductive, cunning, and pervasive nature of power allows for the "manipulation free will and co-optation of freedom" (Caputo, 2000, p. 33). But freedom is not always as willing a victim as power would will. If freedom is resistant and persistent enough it can cause the meta-metaphor to tremble, creating cracks through which the flux can intrude.

At the center of the radical hermeneutic sphere lies the flux, the playing field/battle ground for such ambiguous and complex relationships. The creative space of madness and confusion, the space of mingling metaphors, multiple meaning, radical disturbance, in short, the "thunderstorm" (Caputo, 1987, p. 271).

Yet, within the ambiguity of the violent, agonistic, symbiotic, synergistic interdependent network of forces creative generative possibility is born/borne.

Professional conversation

Professional conversation can be a means for freedom to open the meta-metaphor to the turbulence of the flux. If used as intended, as an opening of experiences and opinions to questioning and testing, it can open the borders of instrumental reason that protects/imprisons the meta-metaphor.

But it takes energy and will to cope, let alone play, in the confounded space of ambiguity. The natural tendency is to retreat, to close the borders of the meta-metaphor; a service power provides. But the thunderstorm within the flux is fierce; it is easy to become disoriented, lost. Now professional conversation must play yet another role, it must provide the means to weather the storm and serve as a conduit for carrying generative possibility back to the space of daily action.

Freedom to "construe"

If power trembles in an awakening to the existence of the flux, then freedom finds strength. The flux offers an ambiguous space, a source of paradox that is both energising and exhausting. The first tenuous steps are the most confusing and disorienting, all at once and little by little everything that freedom has held as truth and led to believe by power is challenged. Yet, there are no obvious responses, alternate truths; freedom is free to interpret the space around it.

But how does one open oneself to alternate interpretations when the only frame of reference one has is that of the meta-metaphor? How might you know

when generative possibility visits, when the only home you have has no place in this foreign land?

It is here, in the confounded flux, that Caputo's (1987) call for radical hermeneutics to be used to "construe" (p. 271) finally has meaning. Like Caputo, "I hasten to add… [that] by construal… I have in mind coming to deal with the loss of meaning by confronting the meaning of the loss, … the particular way one has found of remaining open to the mystery and venturing into the flux… learn to live with it… to stay in play with it." (p. 271); taking up temporary residence just long enough for generative possibility to visit.

Alternate metaphors

Within the radical hermeneutic sphere the flux is surrounded by a multitude of alternate metaphors, alternative ways of seeing and thinking. Their inclusion suggests two roles.

First, perhaps the most simple and obvious role is to show that there are other potent ways of seeing and thinking. The meta-metaphor, although dominant and overgrown, offers no more or no less than any possible alternate way of being; its dominance of the meta-metaphor emanates from the "procedures of power" (Blades, 1997) that are entwined within our social structures. As noted earlier (see Chapter 5, pp. 128-129), within the protective walls of the assumptions that form the meta-metaphor a speaker may assume, no matter how erroneously, that the intent of the message sent will be the intent received. While the meta-metaphor protects the speaker's innocence of intent, one role of the alternate metaphor is to

shatter the speaker's innocence of intent through an opening of the message to multiple interpretations that may generate multiple meanings. The alternate metaphor should be able to act "as a bridge enabling passage from one world to another" (Shiff, 1978, p. 106) facilitating communication "in such a way that meaning stays open, but also clearly enough that meaning remains possible" (Blades, 1997, p. 127).

The second is more complex. As a high school principal there were times, when I was extremely concerned for a student's welfare, one might say I would 'precipitate a crisis' for the student aimed at throwing them off balance. This was done in the hope that they might be shocked into seeing the unseen im/possibilities of the path they had chosen. Caught in the sudden chaos, the student could no longer plan or scheme; all that was left for the student to do was to cope with the unfamiliar space into which they now found themselves. Looking back, I am sure that more than one would agree that the situation had awakened them to the turbulence they had created for themselves and that they had in some way cleverly disguised, often even from themselves. The means used to open the student to the turbulence varied from student to student, situation-to-situation. But the key was that it had to give them reason to generate new possibilities for their future; life became difficult – not impossible.

Alternate metaphors are somewhat akin to this notion of 'precipitating a crisis' in the way that they may open the meta-metaphor to questioning and

testing, exposing the turbulence, and offering a means of revealing generative possibilities.

My technical self wants to ask questions such as: How do you get to the alternate metaphors? Can you just jump from one to the other? Must you pass through the flux? But there are no clear or simple answers to these questions. The responses to these questions are unfolding and depend on the individual or local situation. However, they may take the visual too literally and loose the intent. Perhaps they are generated by the very ambiguity that characterises the flux, for alternate metaphors are in the simplest of terms a means.

However, there is a caution. The day an alternative metaphor becomes more than a means and emerges from the flux re-framed as yet a new meta-metaphor, a new heir to the throne, the new 'Truth,' the answer to the 'Secret,' is the day to organize resistance!

Possibilities for Educational Leadership

Earlier in the text leadership was defined as "the network of relationships that opens the organization and its members to possibility" (see Chapter 2, p. 47). In the context of the business meta-metaphor this network of relationships becomes a means of influencing/controlling decision-making and limiting possibility to the management of resources. This is exemplified, as noted earlier, by the co-option of freedom through the consensus process; the unanimous agreement that everyone can 'live with' the decision.

This reflects the positivist elimination of everything that is perceived negative, only allowing possibilities that support the predetermined response to emerge. In this context experiences are static and unchanging, something to be sorted, picked at will to conveniently illustrate or support the desired outcome. Leadership is the skilled manipulation of options, resources, and most of all people; it is the ability to engineer the consensus that is so integral to site-based decision-making. But it is also a requiem for generative possibility!

Fortunately, like freedom, experience is not always a willing partner. We must not forget the "original difficulty of life" (Caputo, 1987, p. 1), the irreverent intrusion of the unexpected, the unforeseen, the 'other.' This intrusion brings with it new meaning to experience. There are no simple useful interpretations; within the interaction with the 'other,' experience is forever unfolding, never fully unfolded. "The essence (fullness, meaning) does not yield itself up at once, but rather its being is its becoming [italics added], its essence is to unfold its essence through an historical process" (Caputo, 2000, p. 48). Therefore, rather than a washing away of incongruent experience, it is through the constant revisiting and dwelling within experience that meaning and generative possibility emerges. This must be a revisiting rich in "the hardiness of repetition" (Caputo, 1987, p. 263), if we are to keep our institutions "remembering forward" (Carson, 1992), for hope lives not in the recovery of recollection but in conversation that leads to the discovery of generative possibility.

This helps us understand the role of professional conversation even further. When freedom ventures out into the flux, it carries with it, its experiences. In the interaction with the 'other,' freedom's experiences continue to unfold, they take-on new meaning, new understandings, generate new possibilities. The longer freedom dwells in the presence of the other, the further meaning can be construed. Professional conversation can provide the opportunity for exchange, the space for/of dwelling.

In this way we might begin the shift from the modernist role of skilled manipulation of options, resources, and people, to possibility.

Possibility

At minimum leadership's new role is to initiate the conversation, to ask "How else can it be?" by inviting the questioning, pointing out the wall of un/reason that enframes the meta-metaphor, and by encouraging others to listen and look beyond its protective/imprisoning walls and into the flux that is so very much part of us.

To the extreme it may mean that leadership's role is to orchestrate the resistance, encourage the struggle, initiate agonistic questioning aimed at assaulting the meta-metaphor, in essence 'precipitate the crisis.'

But this is a question of choice, a choice that must be accompanied by a caution.

The "risk"

This is a journey in search of the 'other,' in hope that generative possibility will emerge in the interplay. If the purpose of the journey is not to at least attempt to engage in interplay with the 'other' and to dwell with the 'other' in a effort to unfold new meaning within experience and generate new possibility, if it is just a half hearted jog or a fleeting interlude, then it is probably better to stay home. For if you are not willing to "risk" in the encounter by questioning and challenging your assumptions, your understandings, your way of being in the world, then it is likely that all that will occur is confusion, fear, and most dangerous of all paranoia. This may inevitably lead to a fortification of the walls of instrumental reason.

In the opening pages of this text, I wrote about my discomfort with familiar spaces (see Chapter 1, pp. 1-2), the difficulties I experienced as my encounters and interplay with the 'other' increased and the conversation intensified. Part of this discomfort was knowing that, as my friendship with the other grew as symbolised in my attachment to my academic community, I was slowly becoming more emotionally and intellectually alienated from my work community that was so highly enframed by the meta-metaphor of business.

Generative possibility that emerges from the flux through an encounter with the other may not always be received hospitably upon return to the space of daily action. Alternative ways of seeing can be perceived as a threat to the meta-metaphor and met with surprisingly virile resistance. The result can be a

fortification of the walls of un/reason, and a retreat deeper into the protective/contraceptive community fortress.

Here in lies the risk of the radical hermeneutic. For what we are talking about is not Gadamer's fusion of horizons with its "dialectical equilibrium" (Caputo, 2000, p. 58), but Derrida's "beach of the horizon [where] the other [finally] manages to gain a hearing" (p. 58). The risk is twofold. There is the initial personal risk of walking into the "thunderstorm" (Caputo, 1987, p. 271); the risk that comes from a questioning and testing of, and playing with, all that you have held to be true. Then there is the secondary risk, a risk that may even be more painful. The risk upon return with the news of generative possibility is that people may have the perception that you have come home with an intolerable message that must be tempered at best and silenced at the extreme.

The challenge

So we reach the climax, the plot thickens, what to do about the threat generative possibility may pose to the meta-metaphor. Here in lies the truly challenging role for leadership, remember that leadership is not represented in an individual but in the network of relationships, the community of individuals.

Paradoxically, the strength of a community is what allows it to question and challenge all that it holds sacred by exposing the power within [deconstruction], while at the same time it is this same strength of the power within that resists the challenge. The more secure a community is the more capable it is of allowing

freedom an opportunity to introduce generative possibility, however, it is the community security that is also most likely to resist the intrusion of the 'other.'

The hope

Now, we must remember that the purpose of venturing out into the flux is not to remain there indefinitely, we must return to the realm of daily action where generative possibility can be introduced from within; from 'without' you are nothing more than the muffled noise of a shadowy creature. Professional conversation must also serve as a conduit for carrying generative possibility back to the space of daily action. Therefore, the hope for leadership lies in the ability to give voice to freedom as it carries generative possibilities back into the community of the meta-metaphor; freedom, which is essentially constructed in thought and action, must be allowed to breath new life into the realm of daily action.

The Conceptual Example

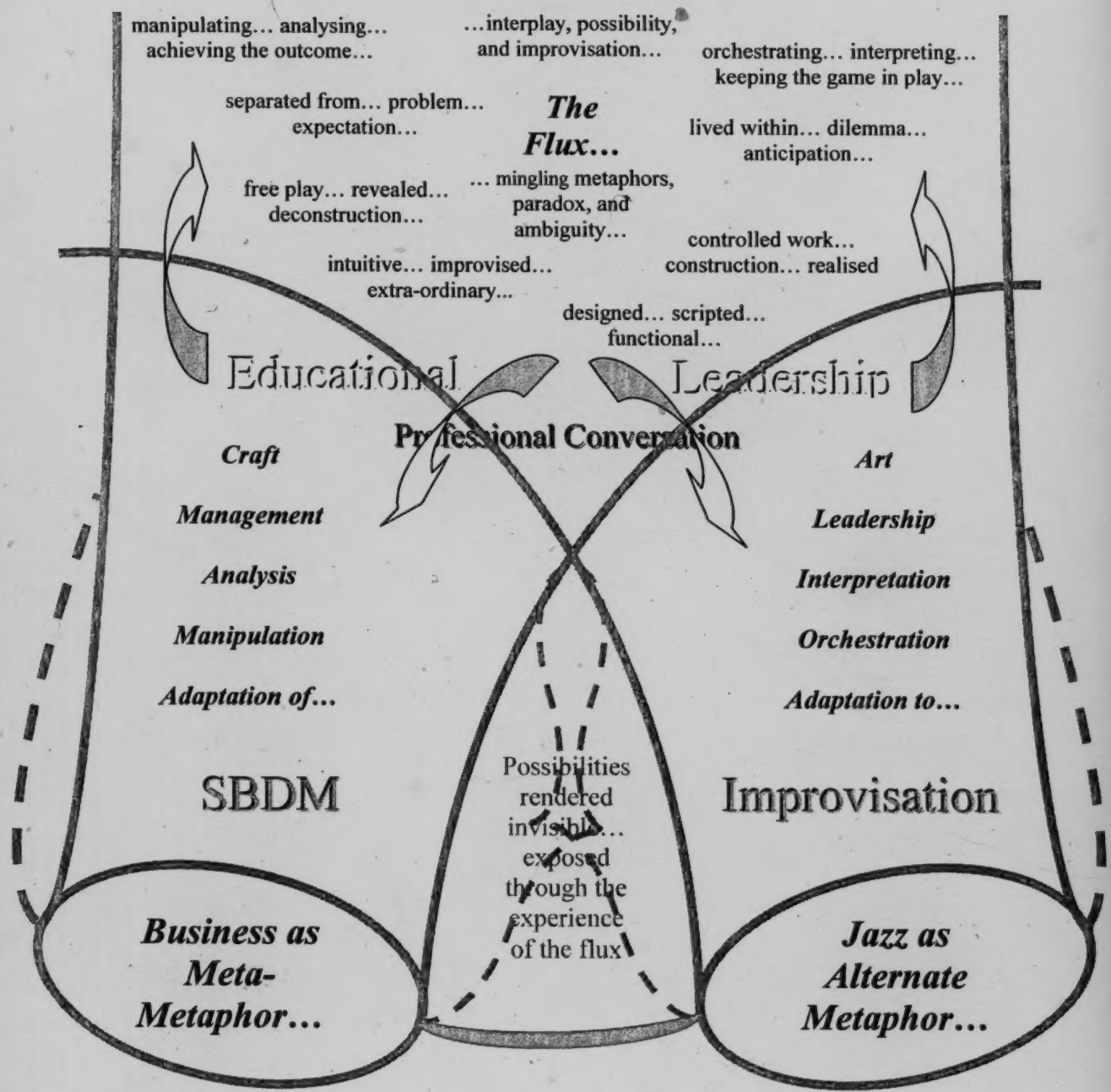
The visual representation that follows, which focuses on but two of the multitude of portals that make-up a hermeneutic sphere, is an attempt to illustrate the interaction between the meta-metaphor of business and alternate metaphor of jazz. Generative possibility emerges in the intersecting space of mingling metaphors, the flux; where the known and unknown question and test one another and are forced to construe meaning from the interplay of ambiguous notions. This is not a space for dichotomies; as noted by Kelly during the group exploration of the differences and similarities between manipulation and orchestration, "it's not that easy, one or the other." Possibility is found in the play between metaphors

where the previously un-thought of emerges from and within the unanswered question, rather than the seeking and acceptance of a definitive answer.

For the alternate metaphor to even begin to call into question the meta-metaphor, it is essential that the chosen alternate metaphor holds meaning beyond the obvious and provides the depth needed to nourish the critique and open generative possibility. It must sufficiently contrast the meta-metaphor to ensure that the needed questioning and testing will occur. This is alluded to in the relationship between the notions associated with each metaphor in the diagram: craft and art; management and leadership; analysis and interpretation. The relationship within these pairs ambiguously speaks of difference and sameness in the same breath; parallel notions that within the flux find new meaning in the inter-play between them.

Although perhaps initially personal, the alternate metaphor must be released into the network of relationships, where it can be opened to new meanings as ideas and notions are changed and re-shaped with each new point of contact; a poetic improvisation where prediction is impossible and possibility limited only by imagination. In the example of the research group's conversation on jazz, it required all of us to call forth the possibilities, even the voice of the meta-metaphor found in Terry's (see Chapter 5, pp. 114-115) thoughtful challenging of the group at we struggled to uncover meaning and understanding in our exploration of jazz as an alternate metaphor.

Figure 2: Conceptualising the Radical Hermeneutic Sphere:
The Example within the Research
...business... } educational leadership { ...jazz...



Prior to moving on to the concluding chapter, I am compelled once again to add the caution that the alternate metaphor too has the potential to become a meta-metaphor. As the alternate metaphor grows in the acceptance of others and becomes the dominant conceptual organizer, it too will develop its own unique "procedures of power" (Blades, 1997). The temptation to focus this study on the possibilities for this particular alternate metaphor was great. In my first awakenings to the possibilities for jazz as an alternate metaphor, I was excited and eager to share. But to be true to the nature of the intended study I had to vigorously resist expounding further than suggested here and in the previous chapter. The intent of the research was not to focus in on any particular alternate metaphor, the alternate metaphor of jazz is but one example of how an alternate metaphor may open generative possibilities.

So what does this research reveal? How might the research and the notions forward within this dissertation be construed in their attempt to open generative possibility? Rather than summarising the research or drawing conclusions, which would deny the radical hermeneutic, Chapter 7 will attempt to open possibilities further by considering how possibilities for educational leadership might be revealed through and within the notions forwarded this research.

Chapter 7: Possibilities for Educational Leadership

Each aspect of this study has presented challenges, the greatest of which has been my ongoing struggle to resist my un/natural tendency to move towards delineated outcomes that come from my ever-present 'technical self' (see Chapter 2, pp. 37-38).

Carson and Sumara (1997) note that…

> …action research is a lived practice that requires that the researcher not only investigate the subject at hand but, as well, provide some account of the way in which the investigation both shapes and is shaped by the investigator. (p. xiii)

As I have noted several times within this text, I have struggled to remain true to a number of proclamations I made in my original proposal, which were rooted in my reading of Caputo (1987). The most difficult of these has been to remain 'open.' Perhaps this struggle stems from my over zealous efforts to suppress my tendency to drive towards resolution that often marks my personal leadership style. Ironically, my recognition of this personal trait drove me to create a space for the research that may have in fact hampered or limited our group's ability to be opened to generative possibilities. It is perhaps for this reason that I have chosen to play with the alternate metaphor of jazz, latch on to the notion of community within our conversation, and attempt to create a visual interpretation in the form of the radical hermeneutic sphere. Like Sandy, I too would have liked at times "to have gotten down to some real hard debate" (see, Chapter 5, p. 151), but I seem to have resisted guiding the group in this direction as a result of my concern that I might shut down conversation. This is not to deny

the value of the conversation that did occur, but to note how "the investigation [has been] shaped" by my prejudices. As I was searching for ways to open our group to the flux, I failed to recognize that I had been swimming in it and it in me all the while. Within the *Ge-stell* of the meta-metaphor of business is an inherent need for structure that simplifies, controls, and systematically leads to predetermined desired outcomes; in essence at the core of the language we use to describe our way of being in the world in the context of the business meta-metaphor is a desire to still the flux. Yet we live in what some may call a post-modern condition, the reality of a world filled with the complexities, ambiguity, indeterminacy, and difficulty of life. At the heart of the struggle that writhes its way throughout this text is the lived contradiction of being an administrator awake to the thunderstorm of the flux, but operating in a world dominated by the meta-metaphor of business.

In light of this contradiction, my choice to use radical hermeneutics as foundation for my research has made the formulation, enactment, and subsequent interpretations profoundly difficult. At times I felt paralysed by my fear that efforts to channel or structure the research process or carry my interpretations in a particular direction were unfaithful to the openness I had interpreted as essential to the radical hermeneutic. Perhaps lost in my efforts to remain open was Caputo's (1987) point that it is important that we be able to return to the world of daily action, "the point is to make life difficult – not impossible" (p. 7).

As noted in the visualisation of the radical hermeneutic sphere, I see the flux as being at the center of our existence; it is a space not foreign but alienated, hidden, or denied by the blinders of the meta-metaphor. It is for this reason that I describe it as that in which we swim and swims within us. The personal journey I started over five years ago is still unfolding as repeated interpretation leads to new understanding. Undoubtedly, within in the context of my deeper understanding of the radical hermeneutics, if I were to begin this research again I would do it differently, which would lead to a writing of this dissertation differently. I most certainly would consider how I might balance the desire to remain open to emergent notions with the opportunity for deeper questioning, testing, and play. Any incongruity that is found between my opening proclamations and this concluding/not-concluding chapter can be attributed to my continuing journey. It is a process unfolding, a lived experience filled with all of its surprises, disappointments, and celebrations.

This having been said, if forced to capture the essence of the response to the central research question,

> *What local possibilities for educational leadership exist in the context of school-based decision-making as mandated by the Alberta government?*

I would have to respond that very few truly generative possibilities are likely to emerge without opening our notions of possibility and educational leadership to very different terms from those commonly accepted in the *Ge-stell* of the business meta-metaphor.

Having said this, I turn to the task of reviewing the research in an effort to further understand the emergent essence of these two central notions, possibility and educational leadership, which in their interpretation have the potential to reshape our children's education. To do this I find it necessary to re-frame the question as follows:

Where might generative possibilities for educational leadership live?

The unfolding argument can be summarized as follows.

Our society and institutional structures, including those of education, are permeated by the business metaphor. Business language, structures, models, and principles influence our ideas and understandings, which in turn guide our actions. The business metaphor is so completely woven into the fabric of our institutions that seldom, if ever, is it questioned. It enframes [*Ge-stell*] all that we do professionally and may even flow into who we are personally. In essence, the business metaphor has become the way of being in our professional lives. It has become more than a dominant metaphor, it is a meta-metaphor, a first cousin to the meta-narrative with its "legitimating function" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 19).

Within the boundaries of the meta-metaphor, possibility is limited to ideas, understandings, and actions that are consistent with the business paradigm; it is restricted to finding 'new ways of doing business.' In this context, leadership hinges on an individual's ability to manipulate people, resources, and circumstance in an effort to achieve predetermined outcomes or targets. The discovery of newly generated or original possibility, generative possibility that

stems from encounters with the unknown 'other' and are filled with wonder, surprise, and anxiety, are at best improbable or even perhaps impossible in the context of the meta-metaphor.

Although I question the probability of generative possibility emerging in the general context of the meta-metaphor, paradoxically, I also see hope for an opening to generative possibility in one of the basic tenets of SBDM. Implied in every SBDM model is the notion of shared leadership, the sharing of responsibility for school-based decisions. Ignoring the limited focus on decision-making and refocusing on the notion of shared leadership lends to the definition of educational leadership found within our group conversation:

> The whole issue of educational leadership… keeps coming back to that network of relationships, making sure that the dynamic between people is strong… that honesty, that trust. (see, Chapter 5, p. 156)

Educational leadership, as understood in this study, is a community network of relationships where professional conversation creates a context for dynamic exchange that can change and reshape ideas, notions, and thoughts in an effort to generate new possibilities, generative possibility for action and practice. However, a re-visioning of educational leadership alone does not in itself create the potential for generative possibility. The network of relationships must also find ways to open itself to the flux; the confounded confusing space beyond the horizon of the meta-metaphor where generative possibility hides in the shadows and is drawn out through encounters with the unknown other.

The research presented in this dissertation suggests that one means to open an educational community to generative possibility is to engage in professional

conversation aimed at questioning and testing our otherwise unquestioning acceptance of the meta-metaphor. This can be further facilitated through play with an alternative metaphor that contrasts the meta-metaphor. Stated differently, professional conversation can be used as a conduit to stimulate and feed the exchange of notions, ideas, and thoughts within an educational community in a poetic improvisation that opens the community to generative possibility. The role of the alternative metaphor is complex. To shake the foundations of the meta-metaphor, it must hold some special meaning for the members of the educational community. As exemplified in the study through the use of jazz as an alternate metaphor, the potential of an alternate metaphor burgeons with its ability to:

- contrast the meta-metaphor sufficiently so as to expose its *Ge-stell* and demonstrate that there are alternative ways of seeing and thinking;
- challenge the "procedures of power" (Blades, 1997) that are entwined within the communities social structures (see Chapter 6, pp. 165-166);
- be meaningful enough to shatter our innocence of intent, and open us and our communities to the turbulence (see Chapter 6, pp. 168-169): and
- most importantly, provide the playground where professional conversation can assist us in opening and being opened to generative possibility.

As noted repeatedly within the research, an awakening to the turbulence of the flux is a risky proposition, so what value can be found in the risk?

This argument is not a binary construct that is designed to produce a 'better way.' Rather, it is meant to encourage a critical look at the reality of our daily lives, beginning with an examination of our prejudices, in the hope of opening generative possibility. It neither denies the utility of the business metaphor nor does it support or reinforce it, but cautions against the lack of critical reflection when looking at our way of being. Further, it suggests that there are other ways to see the world, alternative metaphors upon which we can draw. The value to be found in the risk lies within the hope that our journey will enrich our existence and breath new life into our institutions to which we must return. Even within the world of the business meta-metaphor, there is a sense that generative possibility provides the nudge that carries organizations to new and wonderful places as evidenced in the popular cries for 'thinking outside the box.'

Cultivating a re-visioning of educational leadership and our ability to engage in professional conversation will undoubtedly assist educational communities as they eventually turn to the task of decision-making. The hope is that the decisions and resulting actions will be infused in ways that enhance the quality of our lives and the lives of our students, colleagues, and communities that we touch each day.

In a final ambiguous twist, rather than the research question leading to a concluding argument, this argument leads to yet another question:

> *As part of our educational communities' leadership network, how can we open our colleagues, our institutions, and ourselves to generative possibility that in turn inspires hope and a continued search for generative possibility within our students?*

There are no simple or direct responses to this question. Rather, a response lies in our ability to encourage our educational communities to consider possibilities for action research, professional conversation, and ultimately educational leadership.

In the following sections I will examine more closely the possibilities for action research, professional conversation, education leadership, and metaphor. The obvious exclusion of generative possibility is rooted in the notion that generative possibility does not stand alone but is interwoven into an understanding of these other aspects of the research.

Possibilities for Action Research

The possibilities for action research that grow out of this study are rooted in the attempt to take a holistic view of action research. The notion is to create a space of convergence, where possibilities involve a conscious entwining of both the personal journey and group engagement. This notion acknowledges that action research often begins long before the conception of a formally organised study. It recognises the importance of rooting a study in a personal journey that extends beyond the group activity. It challenges researchers to reach inside their experience in search of the internal intuitive call to the research (Carson & Sumara, 1997).

This moves the research act deeper into the interpretive realm and calls for researchers to question and test the motives behind their chosen studies. It is an invitation to engage in internal professional conversation. And, as with collegial professional conversation, it is essential to move the questioning and testing out

into the flux for a playful visit with forgotten other(s) within. This is exemplified in the study through the opening narrative that uses the metaphor of the duffle coat, my 'maxi,' to describe my growing discomfort with my technical approach to curriculum, and again in my re-acquaintance with "my technical, scientific, artistic, and spiritual sides, [which] compliment one another to form… the composite me" (see Chapter 2, pp. 37-38).

This second reference signalled the turning point when I began to gain additional understanding of the complexity of my chosen research in the recognition that we cannot segment ourselves into discrete parts without diminishing the capacity of the whole. It is within the internal conscious-subconscious conversation that the generative possibilities for self live. It is in the shutting down of that internal conversation by the *Ge-stell* of the meta-metaphor that the foreclosure on possibility occurs. This early reflection contains the essence of my personal action research and alludes to my intention for the group study. It reveals the importance of recognising our technical enframing, *Ge-stell*, and the complexity of our situation, and alludes to the potential for reflection, conversation, and hermeneutic interpretation; it points toward the need to explore 'in-between places' in search of generative possibility. This compelling revelation found within this personal reflective act inspired the ensuing group research by pointing to the synergistic potential for conversation that attempts to be as free as possible of the struggle for resources, recognition, and to some extent power.

In this very initial stage, generative possibility lay in my internal conversation that gave voice to my technical, artistic, and spiritual selves. It was here that I envisioned the hope for professional conversation; the hope that, by engaging in conversation that is free of school and self interests, generative possibilities might emerge. This lead to an envisioning of a group action research centred on the activities of a hermeneutic circle, where as research partners we interrogated our experience, assumptions, and understandings through conversation, as described by Brennan and Noffke (1997), "action research… [that] is particularly concerned with exploring reflexivity" (p. 23), the empowerment of educational leaders in an effort to change what happens in schools. The intention was to have the research partners engage in a collective attempt to change our practice as educational leaders by re-visioning our notions of educational leadership through professional conversation that opens our experience to questioning, testing, and play in an attempt to open ourselves and our practice to generative possibilities.

Schön (1979) defines "generativity" as "nothing less that the question of how we come to see things in new ways" (p. 255). He associates this notion of generativity with metaphor as a means for framing problems; generative metaphor provides a means for problem setting. However, the hope in this action research was to escape the limitations of problem solving.

The linking of generativity with possibility is an attempt to move possibility beyond problem solving, which severely limits it by tying it firmly to a

problem. The search for generative possibility is an invitation to move outside the boundaries of problem solving; it is an invitation to explore the turbulent unknown spaces beyond the security/confines of the meta-metaphor. But one must recognize that this is no ordinary play, it is play that can lead to "delight, poetry, invention, humor, lifetime friendships, self-realization, and occasionally a great creative breakthrough, [but it] can also lead to failure, disappointment, rejection, sickness, or death" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 23). Clearly there are unimaginable risks, as recognized in previous chapters, but it is in the risk that generative possibility lives, in the unexplored in-between spaces. Unfettered by the problem-solution cycle, the value or reward within the risk is the freedom to breakaway from predetermined ways of seeing, thinking, and being in the world, which may allow us to enlighten, enrich, and/or enhance our way of being with our students, colleagues, and communities.

The initial investment in the research that emanates from the personal questioning of understandings, beliefs, and values is essential to moving the group action research beyond the realm of a superficial review of practice to improve craft and skill, beyond improving the way we do business. The internal conversation once shared with others invites them to join in a professional conversation, unfettered of problems related to the manipulation of resources. It is an invitation to risk, to risk the comfort of predictable outcomes in search of generative possibility.

Future possibilities

I realize that there will be those that question the notion of engaging in action research unwittingly or unbeknownst to the researcher in the initial personal stages. I contend that it is this early questioning, reflecting, and altering of perception – and in some ways practice – that signals the beginning stages of action research. These early stages give the research life and additional meaning. However, I also acknowledge that formal recognition accompanied by a reporting of the research must occur for action research to have truly taken place. I also recognize that there will be those that feel that there is nothing extraordinary or new in the mingling of personal reflection and group action research. In fact, reflection is a documented part of the action research cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). However, this is more than just incorporating personal reflection into the action research process. Ambiguously, this is an invitation to 'un-incorporate' personal conversation in recognition of its role as a catalyst for group action research. It is an opportunity to recognize that the personal conversation and the group professional conversation are two intertwining journeys. Although they are inextricably linked, each has a life of its own and may lead to different generative possibilities for self, other, and the group as a whole.

This notion of the separate but interwoven journeys of self and group comes from the experience of this research. Although both journeys are documented in the study, I began this study with a limited conceptual

understanding of how I might do so. Therefore, the possibilities for future research lie in the conscious recording and interpretation of the linkage between the researcher's personal internal action research and the group action research. I believe that an explicit effort to examine how these conversations, internal and external, relate/deviate and diverge/converge would bring new insights into the action research process.

Possibilities for Professional Conversation

The central purpose of professional conversation is to enable understanding; it is an invitation to develop our understandings of self, others, and the contexts we live and form. It is an opportunity to explore relationships and reflect on experience. The dynamic nature of the exchange during the study exemplifies some of the many possibilities for professional conversation that is orchestrated, but unencumbered of the struggles associated with the allocation of human, financial, and material resources. All of the research partners commented in our closing reflections on their appreciation for the opportunity to engage in conversation unfettered of concerns for the impact on resources, free of one-upmanship, and that allowed for ideas to be thrown out for consideration, questioning, testing, and play.

What is being described here is not a conversation free of all structures, but a conversation mediated by a catalyst that neither limits nor allows it to stray too far, conversation that rises out of vigorous exchange. For this study, Blades' three

questions (see Chapter 1, p. 10) provided this catalyst. They resonate throughout the study and are frequently referenced.

Beginning with, "What is it?," the group took a critical look at the implications for the business meta-metaphor as initially exposed in the reading of the research proposal and later developed in conversation. This inevitably lead to "Why is it like that?" and a critique of performance in an attempt to understand our motives, exposing our conscious and subconscious assumptions to questioning and testing. Finally, to a more limited extent, this line of questioning would lead to the question of "How else it could be?," play in search of generative possibilities for action and practice.

This was by no means linear, we wandered back and forth randomly turning and returning to these questions as needed in order to feed a particular reflection or interpretation and resulting conversation. So powerful were these questions as stimulants for the conversation that at various points we articulated the need to engage our colleagues and our school communities in conversations "of this type." At one point, the conversation was so compelling that it was even suggested that school communities should be forced (Alex) to engage in such professional conversations. However, as recognized by all, mandating participation would detract from the trust, genuine quality, and ultimately the value of the conversation.

These three questions, in combination with an alternate metaphor, have the potential to stimulate the questioning and testing needed to open the borders of the

meta-metaphor and provide the context for the emergence of generative possibility. This is only possible if an educational community is willing to re-vision its notions of educational leadership and develop the network of relationships needed to promote trust; trust that encourages and finds strength within the questioning of emergent possibilities developed through shared leadership.

I must add the caution that there is no guarantee that what may emerge within the community conversation will be just and ethical in thought or intent. My general optimism and faith in people would like to believe that what may emerge within the community conversation will ultimately be in the best interest of our communities and most importantly all our students. However, intent may be tarnished, which presents the possibility that there may be those who wish to manipulate the community into an unethical or unconscionable end.

As educators and leaders we have an obligation to our students and school communities to ensure that the opening of generative possibility does not lead to a closing of the community through the propagation of ideas and notions that will harm ourselves and others. We must commit ourselves to ensuring that emergent possibilities are always given needed ethical consideration.

Future possibilities

Professional conversation as presented in the study has a great deal of potential as both means and/or focus for future studies. It may provide the means for future action research whereby a group of professionals can develop their

understanding of their chosen area of study or research question, as it did for our group in looking at possibility and educational leadership.

But professional conversation also warrants further examination as the focus of a study. There are frequent references in the group conversation to the need to engage school staff in professional conversation. Yet without exception, in the same breath, concerns were expressed that it may not be possible to engage in professional conversation with teachers and other staff in the school setting as not everyone may be willing to question, test and play with their assumptions and/or be comfortable engaging the principal and others in professional conversation. Can the conditions needed to allow for professional conversation between a principal and school staff be created?

There are a number of challenges that can be associated with a study of this type. The relationship between Superintendent and school principal is different from that of the principal and the school staff. There is far less daily contact between the Superintendent and school principals. Many of the resource related issues that Superintendent and principals must address are governed by policy and written practice.

A researcher/principal would have to determine what the focus of the professional conversation would be; might it again be educational leadership, or would it be focused elsewhere? Given the more intimate daily relationship between the Principal and school staff, how might the research partners be selected, where would the sessions be held, and how might other staff react?

Beyond these issues of process, the researcher would also have to decide if Blades' three questions, which were a catalyst in the context of this study, could or should provide a stimulus for professional conversation. Long before this study was conceptualised, in the very early stages of my personal action research, these questions created a beacon that guided my internal questioning of self. I strongly believe that it was this very personal relationship with the questions that allowed them to resonate throughout the study and gain meaning within our group conversations.

Yet another issue lies in the ability to create a culture of professional conversation in the context of a school or school jurisdiction. Is it possible to open a community to regular professional conversation that allows it to explore its understandings of a variety of notions? Action research in this area would require a long-term commitment on the part of an educational community.

Possibilities for Educational Leadership

The re-visioning of education leadership as a community network calls for a dramatic change in our understanding of the role of educational leaders. Professional conversation must be allowed to act as a context for sharing ideas, notions, and thoughts in search of generative possibilities that reshape action and practice.

The administrative focus of school-based decision-making on the mechanics of school operations [school-based management] inevitably must remain as a part of the principal's role. The school as an institution must continue

to function. It is the educational leader's role in relation to the role of the community that must change. Superintendents, principals, and other administrators must allow for educational leadership to become a community-based conversation focused on opening generative possibilities that will breath life and hope into the opportunities we offer our students. This sounds terribly simple, a division of labour where administrators administer and the school communities commune. But once again it is essential to understand the complex intertwining relationships that compose the whole. The community conversation must at some point lead to action and changes in practice.

Rather than the allocation of the school's human, financial, and material resources driving possibility, the integration of generative possibility into practice must drive the allocation of these resources. This is a radical shift in the way schools and school systems have interpreted and applied the business model. Clearly the research shows that school-based decision-making inevitably turns into school-based budgeting centred on the allocation of resources (see Chapter 2, pp. 27-31).

This research provides an example of how this can be done through an exploration of the alternate metaphor of jazz. This example suggests that educational leadership as described in the study can orchestrate an unencumbered, improvised, community journey in the hope of discovering generative possibility that will fuel creative practice and enrich our students' educational experiences.

However, this depends on the willingness and ability of administration and community members to share leadership. In this context, the role of administration is to initiate professional conversation, focus on careful listening, and facilitate the development of a shared community melody or theme that provides the context for continuing play.

As noted in the research, this implies a need for inherent trust within the educational community; trust that the opening theme will not be used to shut down conversation or achieve a predetermined outcome. Rather, the structure of the melody should ignite spontaneity and inspire the improvisation; from the finite melody springs infinite possibility. Community and administration, together, must feel free to openly play with the melody, altering harmonies, cadence, and rhythm. They must have the courage to explore dissonance that has the potential to rock the very foundations of the opening theme. In this context, triumph is not measured in perfect notes, but in a willingness to explore possibilities that have the potential to breathe life and hope into our institutions to the benefit of our students.

The response to the cries of superintendents and principals for a return to their roles as educational leaders, which they claim has been usurped by the demands of SBDM (see Chapter 2, pp. 27-31), must lead in new directions. Superintendents must be encouraged to create an atmosphere or culture within their jurisdictions where exploration of the flux and encounters with the unknown other are encouraged and seen by all as an opportunity, rather than a threat.

Principals must be willing to re-vision their role within the educational leadership network of the school, so as to allow community orchestration that will breathe life and hope into our schools and ultimately our students' education. School communities must trust their administrators to take care of the mechanics of school operations; trusting that they will allocate resources as needed to enable the implementation of generative possibility into practice. But for these things to happen, everyone must recognize the power of meta-metaphors to dominate our perception and limit possibility, and once aware, be willing to explore and play with alternate metaphors that inspire hope.

Future possibilities

This study focused on the challenge of opening a Superintendent and five principals to new possibilities for educational leadership with the hope that this small beginning would generate ripples within the school system. Although conversation amongst the research partners seems to indicate that there was an effect beyond the group, this study did not attempt to determine the extent of the impact on our work places. However, much of our conversation seemed oriented towards how we, individually and as a group, might make sense of the ambiguous nature of our lived experience as educational leaders. Daily we function in the *Ge-stell* of the business meta-metaphor that continually attempts to structure and limit possibilities. Yet in our awaking recognition of the complexity and difficulty of life, we sense that by remaining within the confines of the business meta-

metaphor we are limiting opportunities to generate new previously not thought of possibilities.

Many of the challenges for future research described in the previous sections hold true for educational leadership. Change is not a concept that is often met with eager anticipation in schools. Therefore, it would take tremendous commitment on the part of a Principal and/or Superintendent to open a school and/or school system to generative possibility. Yet, there are many wonderful examples where communities in the midst of turbulence have pulled together to respond to their students' needs. The challenge here will be to assess the local situation to determine if a school and/or school system is ready to commit to an opening of its borders in search of generative possibilities. This must include not only the readiness of the school community [staff, parents, and students], but also the willingness of school board members to open policy and practice to the freedom needed to explore previously unexplored spaces.

Possibilities for Metaphor

The many metaphors woven into the text are meant to highlight the ability of a metaphor to conjure up images and shape our way of seeing. Ambiguously, metaphor can both blind us from other ways of seeing, as exemplified by the business meta-metaphor, as well as, heightened our ability to see in new ways, as exemplified in this study by the alternate metaphor of jazz. But it is important to recognize that the use of an alternate metaphor to open the meta-metaphor is using language as tool. As Bleakley (2000) warns, when one uses language in this way

"as a practice of liberation, there are certain things that may be said and those that may not be said" (p. 14); phrased differently, it may be possible to say that as we use and shape language, language uses and shapes us.

I must also note that there are a number of paradoxical twists that may be construed from the use to this particular alternate metaphor of jazz to open the boarders of the business meta-metaphor to the flux. Alternate metaphors may be seen as a way of using language to interpret the flux, which ultimately can become a way of stilling the flux. Yet, if one considers the characteristics of the metaphor of jazz as suggested in Chapter 5 (see pp. 116-117), they may be seen to allude to the very dynamic that is reflective of a hermeneutic circle, an opening of conversation in an attempt to pull on the horizons of participants:

- consonance built on shared purpose, expectations, and hope;
- exploration of possibilities through intuitive improvisation;
- community trust that encourages and celebrates difference; and
- shared leadership that encourages play and invites possibility.

Once again this is not a simple binary argument of whether or not one should explore the use of an alternate metaphor. Rather, it is an issue of ensuring that, should one choose to explore an alternate metaphor, they attempt to understand the chosen metaphor in all its complex possibilities and limitations.

Much of this research depends on the ability to recognize the *Ge-stell* of the business meta-metaphor. From the recognition of the overbearing dominant effect of this powerful metaphor that guides and controls most of what we do in

education springs all other possibilities described in the research. Without this recognition, the possibilities seems slight that educational leadership can be re-visioned through or on the playground of alternate metaphors, or that action research as proposed in the study will find new or additional meaning through an entwining with hermeneutic interpretation.

If at this point there is still any doubt of the power or influence of the business metaphor on education, all one has to do is attempt to identify another metaphor whose language, practice, philosophy, and values are more imprinted on North American education. For some, this will be perceived as a right and natural association linked to the transition students must make into the world of work. However, while I accept that this is but one part of our children's education, I ask that as educators we again consider all else that we wish to impart to future generations; what values, what understandings, and what possibilities should our children's education include?

Challenging and/or escaping the meta-metaphor requires a catalyst that moves our way of perceiving the world in new directions and opens us to generative possibility. The research suggests that if possibility can be manipulated by the repressive power of the meta-metaphor, then perhaps an alternate metaphor can generate productive power capable of orchestrating an opening of possibility through the challenge and confusion the alternate metaphor poses in contrast to the meta-metaphor.

The radical hermeneutic sphere (see Chapter 6, p. 162) is an attempt to visually conceptualize these notions. The flux offers the playing field [a field that resembles more a Roman Coliseum than a modern day sports field] where notions from the surrounding portals of metaphor can collide, merge, wrestle, and dance in the struggle to seed generative possibility.

The illustrative example (see Chapter 6, p. 177) is meant to facilitate an understanding of the intent of the sphere through a look at educational leadership in the context of the relationship between the business meta-metaphor and the alternate metaphor of jazz.

Future possibilities

The research challenges the appropriateness of the business meta-metaphor as the foundation upon which we build our notions of education and frame our education system and institutions. It is quite likely that this growing critique of the dominant metaphor will continue to develop and speculation as to the implications for the future of our students, our institutions, and society in general is likely to continue.

However, while keeping in mind Bleakley's (2000) warning about language as noted above, there may be potential for action research that more directly looks at the possibilities for alternate metaphors. Given the unfolding nature of the research, the possibilities for jazz were not fully explored or developed; nor were they questioned and tested to any meaningful extent. But an exploration of possibilities for any one given alternate metaphor was neither the intent nor the

purpose of this research. Given the suggestion within the research that alternate metaphors can provide a means to open the meta-metaphor to questioning and testing, further action research in this area may produce deeply pedagogical results for our students' education.

As I articulate possibilities for alternate metaphor, I am reminded of Sumara and Davis' (1997) warning about complex situations, "additions to settings are never innocent" (p.304). Within an action research group, it is important to pay attention to "the material objects that mediate practices" for they alter the "complex fabric of relations" (p. 304). As in Sumara and Davis' example of a text, the alternate metaphor chosen by a community as the foundation for their action research will inextricably influence the unfolding of the research partners' lives, so it should be chosen carefully and held lightly.

With all of this in mind, a study where an educational community actively seeks out an alternate metaphor that has meaning for them and explores the possibilities and implications for action and practice in the implementation of the emergent generative possibilities may hold even greater meaning and have a greater influence on the lives and practices of the research partners.

Possibilities Abound: A Concluding/Not Concluding Note

We become so busy coping with our daily tasks and problems that even the most obvious elude us… elude us until we are awakened to the need for a pedagogy of hope that reaches beyond utility and into our hearts and the hearts of our students and school communities.

There are few that would argue the importance of relationships, as demonstrated in our constant efforts to understand them through science, psychology, sociology, religion, models, structures, paradigms; in virtually every aspect of life we struggle to describe, define, and explain our relationships to things and each other. Yet it appears that what we do best within all of our efforts is to limit; we are skilled at creating a finite field of play that confines and constrains possibility.

An opening to possibility lies in our ability to remove these borders that restrict play. The answer to "How else can it be?" lies not in yet another definition, methodology, paradigm, model, or structure; it lies in our ability to let go of these constructs and return to that which makes us human, our desire for connection. It is for this very reason that intuitively I turned to jazz as an alternate metaphor. But in these final moments, as I still struggle to fully express my hope for this study, I am reminded of the simple phrase that I wrote so many months ago, "as a child there were no bounds" (see Chapter 2, p. 37), and realize that sometimes it is the most obvious of metaphors that are the most elusive.

I lived in a neighbourhood where we would go out and play with whoever was there. We were safe in the arms of the community, and the notion of family extended beyond the walls of our homes. This was a childhood of 'pick-up' games, unstructured activities, and mischievous exploration of forbidden places. We were not a terribly affluent community. None of us had the most up-to-date toys or latest fashion, but what we did have we shared without hesitation.

Our most valuable possession was our imagination, an incredible ability to dream and improvise. Often we would raid our families' kitchens and garages to collect up a variety of unrelated artifacts that we would soon turn into our latest invention. On one of these occasions, I remember my mother's horror when she went to get her shopping cart, only to find that it had no wheels. What emerged from out efforts were objects of imagination: the fastest of go-carts, the most challenging of games, and the most difficult of obstacle courses – each the world's best, only to be usurped by our next effort! This was a world rooted in relationships; experience unfolding, where children improvised possibility and allowed empathy and intuition to be their guide. It was a messy business, not perfect, full of mistakes, but more importantly in this finite world of limited resources lived infinite generative possibility.

Years later as a young father, intuitively I again turned to this same creative process to construct with my daughter a dollhouse made of Xerox boxes, old pieces of carpet, and scraps of wallpaper with Popsicle stick and toothpick furniture. Together we created an imaginary world.

Is it so difficult to imagine a school community rooted in such metaphors as family, community, and childhood, where conversation is not centred on how much or how many resources we have, but on how we might use what we have creatively to generate otherwise unimaginable possibilities for our students? As educators and leaders we encounter the unimaginable almost every day of our lives, a situation not thought of before, an unexpected visit. We live and share this

world with the unknown other, and they remain so in our determination to control and manipulate our existence. The answer to the question – how do we prepare for the visit of the unknown other – lies in our ability to develop an openness to generative possibility in the inevitable encounters to come.

So, what of my full-length navy duffle coat, my 'maxi'? There is no doubt that it no longer fits as well as it once did. But now when I slip it on, rather than the concern and discomfort I felt not so long ago, I can laugh at the awkward way I look in the tight fit that refuses to button and limits my movement. However, it still holds a place of honour in my home, for to deny its place, would be to deny a part of the "composite me" (see Chapter 2, pp. 37-38). But what I have learned from this journey is that I can no longer allow it to cloak or disguise the scientific, artistic, and spiritual, for these parts of me encourage critique of, animate play in, inspire possibilities for and offer hope to my role as an education leader.

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Appendix A:
Alberta Learning 2001/2002 – 2003/2004 Business Plan: Goals And Outcomes

Goals	Outcomes
Goal 1 High Quality Learning Opportunities	Responsiveness and Flexibility • The learning system meets the needs of all learners, society, and the economy. • The learning system is flexible and provides a variety of programs and modes of delivery. Accessibility • All Albertans can participate in learning. • Albertans with special needs can participate in learning. Affordability • Cost is not a barrier to learners participating in learning opportunities. • The learning system is affordable.
Goal 2 Excellence in Learner Achievement	• Learners demonstrate high standards. • Learners complete programs.
Goal 3 Well Prepared Learners for Lifelong Learning, World of Work, Citizenship	Learners are well prepared for lifelong learning • Children start school ready to learn. • Learners are able to learn continuously: in school, at work and in society. • Learners' achievement is recognized. Learners are well-prepared for work • Learners are successful in finding and maintaining employment. • Employers are satisfied with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of employees. Learners are well prepared for citizenship
Goal 4 Effective Working Relationships with Partners	• Effective partnerships meet the learning needs of Albertans. • Joint initiatives contribute to the achievement of the social and economic goals of the province.
Goal 5 Highly Responsive and Responsible Ministry	• The Ministry demonstrates value for dollars. • The Ministry demonstrates leadership and continuous improvement in administrative and business processes and practices.

Appendix B:
Except For The School Act: Statues Of Alberta, 2000, Chapter S-3 With Amendments In Force As Of January, 1, 2002, Sections 19 -20

Principals designated

19 (1) A board that operates 1 or more schools shall designate a number of teachers as principals.

(2) The board shall assign a principal to each school.

(3) The board may assign a principal to be a principal of more than 1 school.

Principals

20 A principal of a school must

(a) provide instructional leadership in the school;

(b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;

(c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;

(c.1) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;

(d) direct the management of the school;

(e) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board;

(f) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;

(g) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;

(h) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;

(i) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that a reassigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board.

Appendix C:
Except For The School Act: Statues Of Alberta, 2000, Chapter S-3 With Amendments In Force As Of January, 1, 2002, Sections 22

School council

22 (1) A school council shall be established in accordance with the regulations for each school operated by a board.

(2) The majority of the members of a school council shall be parents of students enrolled in the school.

(3) A board of a separate school district or a division made up only of separate school districts, by resolution, may require that the parents of students enrolled in a school operated by the board who are members of the school council must also be of the same faith as those who established the separate school districts, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.

(4) A school council may, at its discretion,

(a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,

(b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation,

(c) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,

(d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent, and

(e) do anything it is authorized under the regulations to do.

(5) Subject to the regulations, a school council may make and implement policies in the school that the council considers necessary to carry out its functions.

(6) A school council may make by-laws governing its meetings and the conduct of its affairs.

(7) Subject to the regulations, a board may develop and implement policies respecting school councils.

(7.1) A board shall establish an appeal process or conflict resolution procedure under which the principal or the school council may apply respecting disputes on policies proposed or adopted for a school.

(8) The Minister, on the request of the board, may dissolve a school council without notice at any time if the Minister is of the opinion that the school council is not carrying out its responsibilities in accordance with this Act and the regulations.

(9) The Minister may make regulations

(a) respecting the election or appointment of the members of a school council and the term or other conditions of election or appointment and the dissolution of a school council;

(b) respecting the roles of the principal and the school council of a school and their respective powers, duties and responsibilities;

(c) respecting any other matter the Minister considers necessary respecting school councils;

(d) exempting a school or class of schools from the application of this section.

Appendix D:
Alberta Learning Requirements For School-Based Decision-Making Policy

ALBERTA ED. POLICY REQUIREMENT
School Board policy and procedures for school-based decision-making shall:
1. Be applicable to all schools in the jurisdiction but provide for the flexible approaches of school-based decision-making;
2. Focus on teaching and learning;
3. Encourage input from all staff, parents and the community into school-based decisions on programs, instructional services, extra-curricular activities and the allocation of funds to support them;
4. Include goals, objectives and expected outcomes for school-based decision-making;
5. Identify the types of decision expected to be made at the school level;
6. Ensure through established criteria for funding an equitable allocation of funds which respects differences in school populations;
7. Defines the roles, responsibilities and relationships with a focus on broad distribution of power and authority for decision-making among all participants: principals, teachers, instructional support staff, parents, school councils, the community, central office and the board of trustees;
8. Provide for a plan to evaluate the effectiveness for the school-based decision-making process in place in schools;
9. Define procedures for widespread communication and information sharing among stakeholders, including: appropriate involvement in school-based planning, evaluating and reporting processes;
10. Include guidelines for in-service and professional development opportunities for staff and school council members to facilitate changes in roles and responsibilities including: problem solving, management, and communication skills of all stakeholders;
11. Be consistent with School Councils (Policy 1.8.3) and regulations; and
12. Be consistent with Services for Students and Children (Policy 1.8.1).

Appendix E:
Principal SBDM Questionnaire
Circulated January 1998

Developing insights into your school's experience with SBM & SBDM over the past three years is essential to making the necessary adjustments to policy and practice. As the Principal, you have the most direct understanding of the lived experience of SBM/SBDM in the school setting given your responsibility to manage the school and implement government and Board policy. Clearly, your experience has the potential to be the most significant and enlightening. However, it is important to go beyond the standard responses as to the strengths (greater involvement) and weaknesses (takes too much time) of the model. Therefore, you are being asked to share some of your experiences or "stories" about implementing SBM/SBDM. As well, you are being asked to provide an individual critique of the model so that it can be viewed through your experience. Your input and feedback will provide an opportunity to enhance our understanding beyond "just meeting government requirements." Please take the time to provide a full response to each of the following questions.

1. Please describe an experience with **school-based decision-making** that best exemplifies your general experience.

2. Does Board Policy affect the way principals implement **school-based decision-making**? Please describe an experience that illustrates your response.

3. What is the relationship between **school-based management** and **school-based decision-making**? Please describe an experience that illustrates your response.

4. Does present policy provide for appropriate local control? Please describe an experience that illustrates your response.

5. Given your experience with **school-based management** and **school-based decision-making** please provide a brief critique[28] of the model proposed by:
   a) Alberta Education
   b) Our School Division.

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[28] A "critique" is neither meant to be positive or negative, it is an opportunity to express you impressions or thoughts about a particular subject.

Appendix F:
Revised Draft, Presented in August 1997 and Again in January 1998:
Policy D/II/14, School-based Decision-making

1.0 POLICY

1.1 Governance and operation of schools within (the school division) is **the responsibility of** the Board of Trustees **within the context of the Province of Alberta's School Act, policies, and regulations**.

1.2 The Board of Trustees supports a system wide approach to *school-based management* and *school-based decision-making*, recognising the importance of operating as a system to the benefit of all students and all school communities.

1.3 The Board of Trustees **entrusts the school principal with the responsibility for *school-based management* through** the implementation of *school-based decision-making* **as defined in this policy and under the direct supervision of the Superintendent of Schools.**

1.4 The school principal is responsible for ensuring that, when appropriate, school councils, school-based staff, parents, students, and/or community members are encouraged to participate in *school-based decision-making*.

1.5 *School-based management* and *school-based decision-making* will focus on maintaining high standards for teaching and learning, ensuring priority will be given to enhancing learning experiences.

1.6 Each Principal shall establish a consultative decision-making process within each school that includes the School Council, **school-based staff and other stakeholders as required** so as to **provide input to**:

- **1.6.1** the annual establishment of school goals through the development of blueprints;
- **1.6.2** the development and **implementation** of strategies to achieve **school** goals;
- **1.6.3** the implementation of evaluations to measure whether goals have been achieved;
- **1.6.4 the review of the draft of the school budget plan for the coming year; and**
- **1.6.5 consultation on other items and issues.**

1.7 Goals, strategies, and evaluations in each school shall be in harmony with the educational and fiscal goals, school operation expectations, **and policy** set by the Board of Trustees **in the context of those set by Alberta Education**.

1.8 **To facilitate School-based Management,** the majority of funds contained in the Instructional Block shall be **allocated** to schools each budget year, with responsibility and accountability for spending lodged with school principals.

2.0 GUIDELINES

2.1 The school principal is responsible for effective *school-based management*, including all aspects of instruction, student services, and school operations in adherence to Board policy, the School Act and within the context of Alberta Education policy and regulations.

2.2 The relationship between *school-based management* and *school-based decision-making* is defined as follows:

2.2.1 ***School-based management*** **(SBM) is the process by which decisions related to instruction, student services and school operations are made at the school level by the school principal.**

2.2.2 ***School-based decision-making*** **(SBDM) is a reference to the process by which decisions are shared with stakeholders. Persons closest to the students are provided with an opportunity to be involved in decisions about instruction, student services, and school operations. Stakeholders include School Council, school-based staff, parents, students, and other members of the community as required.**

2.2.3 ***School-based management*** **does not mean that all decisions must be shared. However, where appropriate, through** ***school-based decision-making*** **stakeholders may be involved in decisions that have a direct impact on instruction, students services and school operations.**

2.3 Both ***school-based management*** **and** ***school-based decision-making*** **must maintain as the first priority a focus on enhancing learning experiences. Decisions shared with stakeholders related to services to students and school operations should reflect this primary focus.**

2.4 Principals shall facilitate the establishment and operation of School Councils in their schools, in keeping with the School Act and Regulation, and the policy of the Board of Trustees, **and ensure their opportunity for involvement in** ***school-based decision-making*** **where appropriate as described in 2.2.**

2.5 The role of the School Council in the context of ***school-based management*** **and** ***school-based decision-making*** **is to: (Refer also to Policy C/3, School Councils.)**

2.5.1 advise and consult the principal on matters and issues related to the school, focusing on providing a positive learning environment for students,

2.5.2 work constructively with the principal and the school staff to resolve issues and provide a positive learning environment for students, and

2.5.3 work constructively with the Board of Trustees, recognising the need to provide services for all students and all school communities.

2.6 The role of the school-based staff in the context of ***school-based management*** **and** ***school-based decision-making*** **is to:**

2.6.1 advise and consult the principal on matters and issues related to the school, focusing on the quality of instruction and learning in the classroom; and

2.6.2 work constructively with the principal in the implementation of school-based decisions to ensure satisfactory results and student success.

2.7 The **role of the** Board of Trustees **is to**:

2.7.1 set policy concerning ***school-based management*** **and** *school-based decision-making* **to facilitate school initiatives**, and modify such policy as the Board deems appropriate in keeping with the School Act and Regulation;

2.7.2 adjudicate any proposals from **principals on behalf of their** schools concerning ***school-based management and*** *school-based decision-making* which require enabling policy from the Board of Trustees, **and**

2.7.3 articulate a sense of vision, purpose and direction for the Division that promotes a divisional perspective and inter-school cooperation, recognising the needs of all students and all school communities.

2.8 The role of Central Office administration is to support and enable *school-based management* and *school-based decision-making*, as guided by School Board policy, to:

2.8.1 implement the vision, purpose, and direction for the Division and promote teamwork;
2.8.2 provide support services to schools;
2.8.3 support school principals in their effort to provide services to students and parents;
2.8.4 articulate and provide administrative practices to enable and facilitate school initiatives directed at enhancing learning experiences;
2.8.5 facilitate the equitable distribution of Instructional Block funds to schools;
2.8.6 facilitate the sharing of services among schools
2.8.7 ensure effective and efficient distribution of information to schools;
2.8.8 manage effectively centralized services, including but not exclusive to:
- **special education;**
- **general education services and program, including curriculum;**
- **evaluation systems;**
- **technology;**
- **transportation;**
- **maintenance;**
- **financial management; and**
- **personnel management;**

2.8.9 ensure that each school operates effectively and efficiently;
2.8.10 respond to requests for assistance with conflict resolution and appeals; and
2.8.11 provide any other function or service deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees.

2.9 The Board of Trustees will allocate funds through the annual budget process to schools, and principals are responsible for facilitating decisions within the limits of available resources at the school level concerning school programs and services in accordance with Board Policy.

2.10 This policy is subject to amendment as practice and experience may signal **through continued** implementation of ***school-based management*** **and** *school-based decision-making*, **and all stakeholders are encouraged to provide input in the spirit of continuous improvement.**

3.0 PROCEDURES

3.1 The principal, as the individual responsible for *school-based management* with a focus on maintaining high standards for teaching and learning, and ensuring priority will be given to enhancing learning experiences shall:

3.1.1 ensure that the school council is informed annually at the beginning of the school year of its rights and responsibilities under Board policy, the School Act and Alberta Education regulations;
3.1.2 ensure that the school annually formulates a school programs and services Blueprint, in conformance with Alberta Education, Division and school expectations;

3.1.3 ensure that the Blueprint **is** presented to the Board of Trustees **annually on a date to be determined by the Superintendent**, by a delegation of representatives from each school, which should include **at least** one parent member of the School Council;

3.1.4 ensure that the school annually conducts an evaluation of results obtained from the implementation of its Blueprint, in a format approved by the Superintendent of Schools, and shall report out to the Board of Trustees, its School Council and its school community;

3.1.5 determine the staffing needs of the school in adherence to provincial statute and legal jurisprudence, existing Collective Agreements between the Board of Trustees and employee groups, and the policy of the Board of Trustees;

3.1.6 ensure that the school annually formulates a school budget plan, in conformance with Board and Alberta Education policy, regulation and expectations; and

3.2 The principal shall ensure that all stakeholders are provided with information related to their role with regard to *school-based decision-making* and, in particular, the emphasis given to enhancing learning experiences in the context of Board policy, the School Act and Alberta Education policy and regulations. To this end, the principal shall:

3.2.2 establish a *school-based decision-making* process tailored to the particular school context and consistent with Board and Alberta Education policy, regulation and expectations;

3.2.3 ensure that stakeholders participating in a *school-based decision-making* process understand:

3.2.3.1 the implications and impact of a particular decision, and any background or contextual information needed to make an informed decision;

3.2.3.2 how the decision will be made and their role in the decision-making process, whether based on:

- **consultation, where the decision maker is provided with input from stakeholders, and takes the information and/or advice into consideration when making the decision;**
- **high agreement, where the decision is made by a "majority vote" of those impacted by the decision, and everyone is responsible and accountable for implementing the decision; or**
- **consensus building, where each stakeholder has input into the decision, and is willing to integrate the group thinking into their thinking to reach a compromise that all are willing to support;**

3.2.4 facilitate the implementation of the decision, and recruit the support of the stakeholders involved in the process to facilitate the implementation of the decision;

3.2.5 evaluate the results of the decision with input from the stakeholders involved in the process as required; and

3.2.6 when requested by the Board through the Superintendent, explain the nature of the decision, the process used to make the decision and/or the reasoning behind the decision.

3.3 **In accordance with the provisions of 2.8 the Superintendent of Schools shall ensure that:**

3.3.1 administrative practices are reviewed regularly to ensure that they provide the context necessary to *school-based management*;

3.3.2 where appropriate, assistance is provided to support the sharing of services between schools; (Refer to Policy D/II/16, Shared Services for Schools.)

3.3.3 the focus of all centralized services is to provide support to schools;

3.3.4 principals understand and implement effectively *school-based management* and *school-based decision-making* as defined in this policy; and

3.3.5 an appropriate format is established for school Blueprints, and that principals annually conduct and evaluation of results obtained from the implementation of the school Blueprint.

3.4 In the event that *school-based decision-making* as defined in this policy results in an impasse between the school council and the principal:

3.4.1 Either the school council chair with the support of a majority of the school council members, or the principal, may request that the Superintendent or his delegate mediate a resolution to the impasse.

3.4.2 If reasonable mediation efforts are unsuccessful, the Superintendent shall make a decision regarding the matter and inform in writing all parties of the decision in a timely manner.

3.4.3 Either the school council chair with the support of a majority of the school council members, or the principal, may submit a written appeal to the Board of Trustees within ten (10) days of receiving the written decision of the Superintendent.

3.4.4 The Board of Trustees or committee designated by the Board of Trustees will review the appeal and render a decision in writing.

3.4.5 The decision of the Board of Trustees or designated committee will be final and binding on all parties concerned.

3.5 In addition to existing School Board policies, which enable amendment of policy, principals may at any time bring forward proposals to amend the policy of the Board of Trustees, subject to all of the following conditions:

3.5.1 the proposed amendment is required to facilitate the implementation of a new initiative at a school, arising from School-based Decision-making, which current policy does not allow;

3.5.2 the proposed amendment is not contrary to the School Act and Regulation, Alberta Education Guidelines, or Collective Agreements currently in place between the Board of Trustees and employee groups;

3.5.3 the proposed amendment is supported by **both** the Principal **and** the School Council, and where applicable, has the support of the school's community-at-large;

3.5.4 the proposed amendment is well researched and provided formally in writing, and in a timely manner with regard to implementation expectations, to the Superintendent of Schools; **and**

3.5.5 the proposed amendment has included the appropriate staff from Central Office during the research and formulation period.

3.6 The Superintendent of Schools shall forward any proposed policy amendment **that meets the conditions as outlined in 3.5** to the Board of Trustees for its consideration.

3.7 **The Board of Trustees will decide if the policy amendment is to be made, and** the decision of the Board of Trustees is final.

Note: the Board of Trustees approved the first School-based Decision-making Policy on January 17, 1996.
Bold text indicates changes or additions made to the January 17, 1996 approved policy.

Appendix G:
Research Group Proposed Process – Session 1
(Draft 1 - Before Revision)
February 29, 2000 - 5:30 p.m.

The process and questions outlined below are a guideline to initiate discussion and provide the group with an early opportunity to enter into conversation. It may be necessary for me to initiate conversation or add information early on, but I want the group to develop their own sense of leadership as described in the research proposal:

> *... the energy that surges through a network of relationships, creating new meanings as it is changed and re-shaped at each point of contact; a poetic improvisation where prediction is impossible and possibility limited only by imagination.*

I realize that this may be asking a lot, but unless I allow for awkward silences without giving in to my normal need to fill them, knowing the members of the group I am sure that they will begin to share. If things seem to be seriously stalling, I will have to rely on my ability to identify appropriate questions to stimulate or re-ignite conversation.

During the candidacy exam, it was suggested that I share a story, perhaps of my experience as a principal, to stimulate/initiate/model a narrative, I think that this may be a way to end the session. It may help the others understand the expectation, and allow one of them to start the next session. Again, an opportunity for one of the other members of the group to exercise leadership.

1. A brief summary of the proposed research:

Key Question:

- From your reading of the research proposal, how would you describe what we hope to do as a group?

Notes:

The aim is to provide participants with an opportunity to move beyond reflection on practice into a blending of reflection and theory into practice through a cycle of gathering stories, reflections, materials, and artefacts related to their experience, sharing their experience, engaging in interpretive conversation, trying out emergent ideas, and returning to share new experiences (p. 45).

We will construct a "Common Place Book" that records our journey. It will be place we collect our stories (narratives), thoughts, reflections, observations, notes, memos, and any other materials or artefacts related to our exploration of the central research question. The book will inform and stimulate the conversational sessions, and be a place for sharing experiences and exploring possibilities (p. 45).

Ultimately the goal is to respond to the central research question!

2. **A description of the expectations for participants in the context of action research:**

   Key Question:

   - What do you believe will be expected of you as a member of the research group?

   Notes:

   - *Share your stories, insights, reflections, and interpretations*
   - *Contribute to the common place book: What is it? What does it say?*
   - *Review and interpret transcripts of our conversations*
   - *Collectively respond to the central research question.*

3. **Sharing participants' expectations.**

   Key Questions:

   - What are your expectations for the research?
   - What do your hopes for our journey?

4. **Conversation centered on participants reading of the research proposal.**

   Guiding Questions:

   - Were there particular aspects of the research proposal that you found interesting, curious, confusing, questionable…?
   - Did the research proposal raise any questions that you would like to explore further?

5. **Initial sharing of participants' understandings of the research question:**

   Guiding Questions:

   - If asked, "What local possibilities for educational leadership exist in the context of school-based decision-making as mandated by the Alberta government?, how might you answer?

Notes:

Participants will have the opportunity to provide spontaneous responses. This may take a while to get going, hopefully, once one begins the others will join. Must watch for those that are hesitant and gently encourage them to provide their interpretation of the question.

There will be a need to break the question up, deconstruct the various elements in future sessions. (local, possibility, leadership, educational leadership, SBDM, SBDM in Alberta) But at this early stage I would like to access general understandings, and allow participants to build a general level of comfort exploring the question.

6. **Group discussion as to how we should proceed:**

Key Questions:

- What is a realistic number of sessions from now to June 30th? *(6 – 8)*
- How many sessions should we schedule? *(The next 2, 4? All?)*
- What is the best time for us to meet? *(Monday evenings?)*
- Where should be meet? *(My place?)*
- What do we need to do in preparation for our next meeting?

Common Place Book: (Scrapbook?)

Collect anything that even vaguely is suggestive of:

- *Your lived experience of educational leadership;*
- *Your leadership style;*
- *How you animate/facilitate/implement SBDM;*
- *Local possibility;*
- *Expectations/understandings/perceptions of/for you in your role;*
- *SBDM in Alberta; and*
- *Anything else you would like to share with the group...*

This could include, but is not limited to, narratives, thoughts, reflections, observations, notes, memos, and other materials and/or artefacts. Consider the example used during our initial conversation of a picture of the principal drawn by the Grade 2 student!

A Story to Share:

Write a story about your experience as a principal that is related to/motivated by our conversations, your reading of the research proposal, some aspect of educational leadership or SBDM.

7. **Group processing:**

Key Questions:

- What did you enjoy about the evening?
- What might we do differently in future sessions?

8. **Closing story**

- My first principalship: *Notions verses Reality*

Appendix H:
Letter of Consent for Participants

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study examining "The Possibility of School-based Decision-making."

As indicated during our conversation, you have been invited to participate in a qualitative action research project centered on the activities of a hermeneutic circle. The aim is to provide participants with an opportunity to move beyond reflection on practice into a blending of reflection and theory into practice through a cycle of sharing experiences, engaging in interpretive conversation, trying out emergent ideas, and returning to share their new experiences. The study will parallel the annual planning cycle for the School Division and schools, approximately a five-month period from February to June. However, the parameters of the study will be open and flexible, adjusting to meet the needs of the participants and responding to the direction chosen by the research group.

Both written and recorded data will be collected from group sessions and individual conversations. Material from the "Common Place Book" that participants will construct together, as well as any additional reflections or material offered by participants, will be taken into consideration. I will transcribe the tapes and provide copies to participants for confirmation, reflection, and interpretation. Please note that, you have the right to withdraw in whole or in part any of your contributions at any time during collection and review prior to publication. Further, it is extremely important that you know that you have the right to withdraw completely from the research at any time without any personal or professional repercussions.

I wish to reassure you that I take seriously my responsibility for the confidentiality and anonymity of personal information. Therefore all references to individuals and locations will be replaced by fictitious names or alphanumeric references. As well, I ask that you and all participants exercise your responsibility to keep confidential all references to others mentioned in conversation and written data, both before and after publication of the dissertation.

I will be in contact to arrange our first group session in the near future. However, should you have any questions or concerns at any time throughout the research please feel free to contact me at home (472-7778), at work (939-4341), or on my cellular phone (918-4916). Once again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research, I believe that the experience has the potential of being both informative and rewarding.

Sincerely,

J. Kenneth Robertson

I, _____ agree to participate in the research study under the conditions as outlined above.

Dated at Edmonton, this _____ day of _____, 2000.

_____
Research Participant